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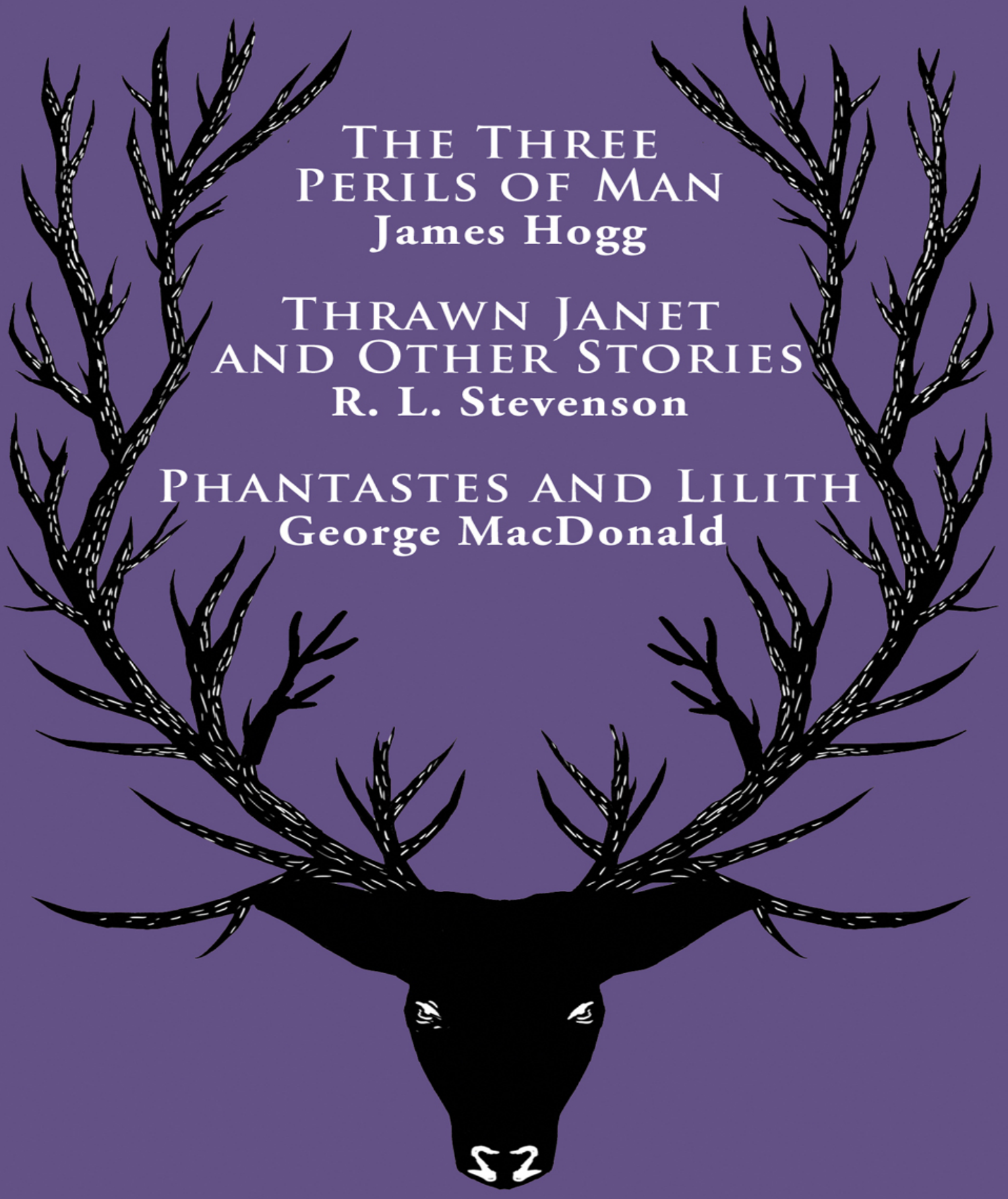

The Three Perils of Man
James Hogg

Thrawn Janet and Other Stories
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Phantastes and Lilith
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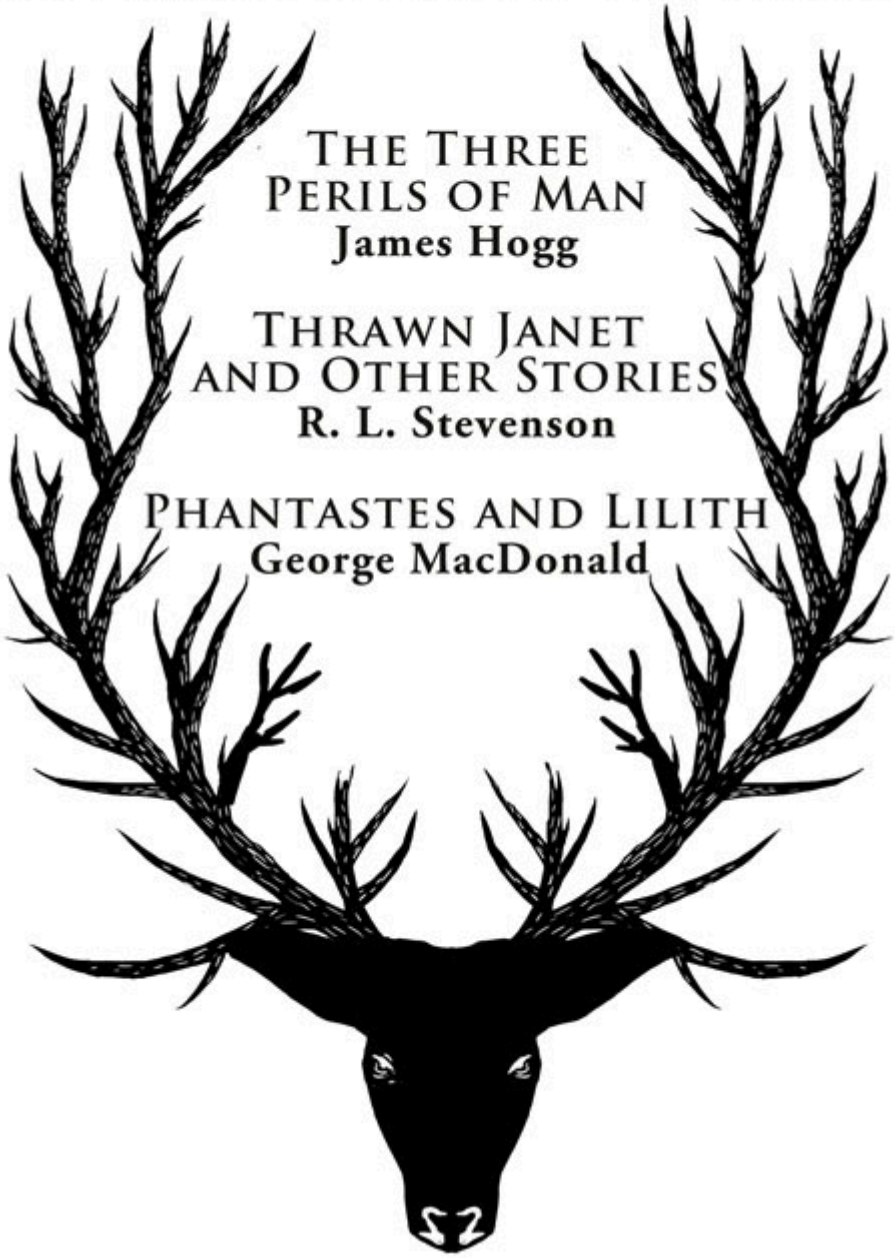

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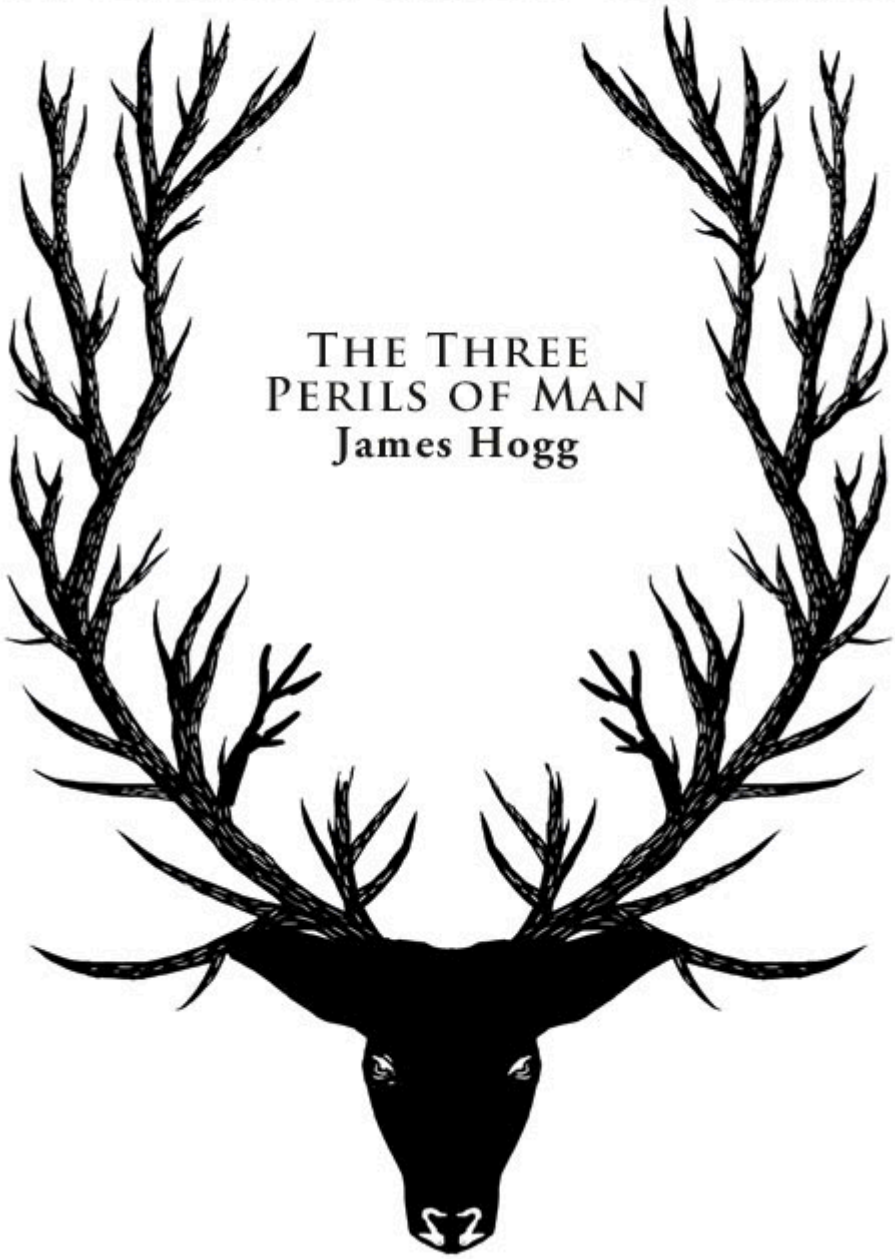

THE THREE PERILS OF MAN

James Hogg

‘I’ll tell ye my first adventure in war – for I aye mind it the best, and will do so as long as I live.’

About the Author

James Hogg (1770–1835) is best known for the novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. His family were farmers, but became labourers on a neighbour's farm after his father was declared bankrupt. Hogg worked for a time as a shepherd's assistant and later a shepherd, teaching himself to read from the newspapers and other works passed to him by the wife of his employer. In 1790 he began working for James Laidlaw, who helped Hogg further his education by allowing him access to his library. He started writing songs and plays. He began to be recruited for various anthologies including Walter Scott's *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* and in 1810 moved to Edinburgh to pursue a full time writing career. Hogg was a prolific writer throughout his life, producing novels, poetry and songs up until his death in 1835.

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CHAPTER 1

There was a king, and a courteous king,
  And he had a daughter sae bonnie;
And he lo'ed that maiden aboon a' thing
  I' the bonnie, bonnie halls o' Binnorie.

But wae be to thee, thou warlock wight,
  My malison come o'er thee,
For thou hast undone the bravest knight,
  That ever brak bread i' Binnorie!

Old Song

The days of the Stuarts, kings of Scotland, were the days of chivalry and romance. The long and bloody contest that the nation maintained against the whole power of England, for the recovery of its independence – of those rights which had been most unwarrantably wrested from our fathers by the greatest and most treacherous sovereign of that age, with the successful and glorious issue of the war, laid the foundation for this spirit of heroism, which appears to have been at its zenith about the time that the Stuarts first acquired the sovereignty of the realm. The deeds of the Douglasses, the Randolphs, and other border barons of that day, are not to be equalled by any recorded in our annals; while the reprisals that they made upon the English, in retaliation for former injuries, enriched both them and their followers, and rendered their appearance splendid and imposing to a degree that would scarcely now gain credit. It was no uncommon thing for a Scottish earl then to visit the Court at the head of a thousand horsemen, all splendidly mounted in their military accoutrements; and many of these gentlemen of rank and family. In court and camp, feats of arms were the topic of conversation, and the only die that stamped the character of a man of renown, either with the fair, the monarch, or the chiefs of the land. No gentleman of noble blood would pay his addresses to his mistress, until he had broken a spear with the knights of the rival nation, surprised a strong-

hold, or driven a prey from the kinsmen of the Piercies, the Musgraves, or the Howards. As in all other things that run to a fashionable extremity, the fair sex took the lead in encouraging these deeds of chivalry, till it came to have the appearance of a national mania. There were tournaments at the castle of every feudal baron and knight. The ploughmen and drivers were often discovered, on returning from the fields, hotly engaged in a tilting bout with their goads and plough-staves; and even the little boys and maidens on the village green, each well mounted on a crooked stick, were daily engaged in the combat, and riding rank and file against each other, breaking their tiny weapons in the furious onset, while the mimic fire flashed from their eyes. Then was the play of *Scots and English* begun, a favourite one on the school green to this day. Such was the spirit of the age, not only in Scotland, but over all the countries of southern Europe, when the romantic incidents occurred on which the following tale is founded. It was taken down from the manuscript of an old Curate, who had spent the latter part of his life in the village of Mireton, and was given to the present Editor by one of those tenants who now till the valley where stood the richest city of this realm.

There were once a noble king and queen of Scotland, as many in that land have been –. In this notable tell-tale manner, does old Isaac, the curate, begin his narrative. It will be seen in the sequel, that this king and queen were Robert the Second and his consort –. They were beloved by all their subjects, (continues he,) and loved and favoured them in return; and the country enjoyed happiness and peace, all save a part adjoining to the borders of England. The strong castle of Roxburgh, which was the key of that country, had been five times taken by the English, and three times by the Scots, in less than seventeen months, and was then held by the gallant Lord Musgrave for Richard King of England.

Our worthy king had one daughter, of exquisite beauty and accomplishments; the flower of all Scotland, and her name was Margaret. This princess was courted by many of the principal nobility of the land, who all eagerly sought an alliance with the royal family, not only for the additional honour and power which it conferred on them and their posterity, but for the personal charms of the lady, which were of that high eminence, that no man could look on her without admiration. This emulation of the lords kept the court of King Robert full of bustle, homage, and splendour.

All were anxious to frustrate the designs of their opponents, and to forward their own; so that high jealousies were often apparent in the sharp retorts, stern looks, and nodding plumes of the rival wooers; and as the princess had never disclosed her partiality for one above another, it was judged that Robert scarcely dared openly to give the preference to any of them. A circumstance, however, soon occurred, which brought the matter fairly to the test.

It happened on a lovely summer day, at the end of July, that three and twenty noble rivals for the hand of the beauteous princess were all assembled at the palace of Linlithgow; but the usual gaiety, mirth, and repartee did not prevail; for the king had received bad tidings that day, and he sat gloomy and sad.

Musgrave had issued from the castle of Roxburgh, had surprised the castle of Jedburgh, and taken prisoner William, brother to the lord of Galloway; slain many loyal Scottish subjects, and wasted Teviotdale with fire and sword. The conversation turned wholly on the state of affairs on the border, and the misery to which that country was exposed by the castle of Roxburgh remaining in the hands of the English; and at length the king enquired impatiently, how it came that Sir Philip Musgrave had surprised the castle this last time, when his subjects were so well aware of their danger.

The earl of Hume made answer, that it was wholly an affair of chivalry, and one of the bravest and noblest acts that ever was performed. Musgrave's mistress, the lady Jane Howard, of the blood royal, and the greatest heiress of the north of England, had refused to see him, unless he gained back his honour by the retaking of that perilous castle, and keeping it against all force, intercession, or guile, till the end of the Christmas holidays. That he had accomplished the former in the most gallant stile; and, from the measures that he had adopted, and the additional fortifications that he had raised, there was every possibility that he would achieve the latter.

'What,' said the king, 'must the spirit of chivalry then be confined to the country of our enemies? Have our noble dames of Scotland less heroism in their constitutions than those of the south? Have they fewer of the charms of beauty, or have their lovers less spirit to fulfil their commands? By this sceptre in my right hand, I will give my daughter, the princess Margaret, to

the knight who shall take that castle of Roxburgh out of the hands of the English before the expiry of the Christmas holidays.'

Every lord and knight was instantly on his feet to accept the proposal, and every one had his hand stretched towards the royal chair for audience, when Margaret arose herself, from the king's left hand, where she was seated, and flinging her left arm backward, on which swung a scarf of gold, and stretching her right, that gleamed with bracelets of rubies and diamonds, along the festive board, 'Hold, my noble lords,' said she; 'I am too deeply interested here not to have a word to say. The grandchild of the great Bruce must not be given away to every adventurer without her own approval. Who among you will venture his honour and his life for me?' Every knight waved his right hand aloft and dashed it on the hilt of his sword, eyeing the graceful attitude and dignified form of the princess with raptures of delight. 'It is well,' continued she, 'the spirit of chivalry *has not* deserted the Scottish nation – hear me then: My father's vow shall stand; I will give my hand in marriage to the knight who shall take that castle for the king, my father, before the expiry of the Christmas holidays, and rid our border of that nest of reavers; but with this proviso only, that, in case of his attempting and failing in the undertaking, he shall forfeit all his lands, castles, towns, and towers to me, which shall form a part of my marriage-portion to his rival. Is it fit that the daughter of a king should be given up or won as circumstances may suit, or that the risk should all be on one side? Who would be so unreasonable as expect it? This, then, with the concurrence of my lord and father, is my determination, and by it will I stand.'

The conditions were grievously hard, and had a damping and dismal effect on the courtly circle. The light of every eye deadened into a dim and sullen scowl. It was a deed that promised glory and renown to adventure their blood for such a dame – to win such a lady as the Princess of Scotland: But, to give up their broad lands and castles to enrich a hated rival, was an obnoxious consideration, and what in all likelihood was to be the issue. When all the forces of the land had been unable to take the castle by storm, where was the probability that any of them was now to succeed? None accepted the conditions. Some remained silent; some shook their heads, and muttered incoherent mumblings; others strode about the room, as if in private consultation.

‘My honoured liege,’ said Lady Margaret, ‘none of the lords or knights of your court have the spirit to accept of my conditions. Be pleased then to grant me a sufficient force. I shall choose the officers for them myself, and I engage to take the castle of Roxburgh before Christmas. I will disappoint the bloody Musgrave of his bride; and the world shall see whether the charms of Lady Jane Howard or those of Margaret Stuart shall rouse their admirers to deeds of the most desperate valour. Before the Christmas bells have tolled, that shall be tried on the rocks, in the rivers, in the air, and the bowels of the earth. In the event of my enterprise proving successful, all the guerdon that I ask is, the full and free liberty of giving my hand to whom I will. It shall be to no one that is here.’ And so saying she struck it upon the table, and again took her seat at the king’s left hand.

Every foot rung on the floor with a furious tramp, in unison with that stroke of the princess’s hand. The taunt was not to be brooked. Nor was it. The haughty blood of the Douglasses could bear it no longer. James, the gallant earl of Douglas and Mar, stepped forward from the circle. ‘My honoured liege, and master,’ said he, ‘I have not declined the princess’s offer – beshrew my heart if ever it embraced such a purpose. But the stake is deep, and a moment’s consideration excusable. I have considered, and likewise decided. I accept the lady’s proposals. With my own vassals alone, and at my own sole charge, will I rescue the castle from the hands of our enemies, or perish in the attempt. The odds are high against me. But it is now a Douglas or a Musgrave: God prosper the bravest!’

‘Spoken like yourself, noble Douglas,’ said the king, ‘The higher the stake the greater the honour. The task be yours, and may the issue add another laurel to the heroic name.’

‘James of Douglas,’ said Lady Margaret, ‘dost thou indeed accept of these hard conditions for my sake? Then the hand of thy royal mistress shall buckle on the armour in which thou goest to the field, but never shall unloose it, unless from a victor or a corpse!’ And with that she stretched forth her hand, which Douglas, as he kneeled with one knee on the ground, took and pressed to his lips.

Every one of the nobles shook Douglas by the hand, and wished him success. Does any man believe that there was one among them that indeed wished it? No, there was not a chief present that would not have rejoiced to have seen him led to the gallows. His power was too high already, and they

dreaded that now it might be higher than ever; and, moreover, they saw themselves outdone by him in heroism, and felt degraded by the contract thus concluded.

The standard of the Douglas was reared, and the bloody heart flew far over many a lowland dale. The subordinate gentlemen rose with their vassals, and followed the banner of their chief; but the more powerful kept aloof, or sent ambiguous answers. They deemed the service undertaken little better than the frenzy of a madman.

There was at that time a powerful border baron, nicknamed Sir Ringan Redhough, by which name alone he was distinguished all the rest of his life. He was warden of the middle marches, and head of the most warlike and adventurous sept in all that country. The answer which this hero gave to his own cousin, Thomas Middlemas, who came to expostulate with him from Douglas, is still preserved verbatim: 'What, man, are a' my brave lads to lie in bloody claes that the Douglas may lie i' snaw-white sheets wi' a bonny bedfellow? Will that keep the braid border for the king, my master? Tell him to keep their hands fu', an' their haunches toom, an' they'll soon be blythe to leave the lass an' loup at the ladle; an' the fient ae cloot shall cross the border to gar their pots play brown atween Dirdanhead and Cocketfell. Tell him this, an' tell him that Redhough said it. If he dinna work by wiles he'll never pouch the profit. But if he canna do it, an' owns that he canna do it, let him send word to me, an' I'll tak' it for him.'

With these words he turned his back, and abruptly left his cousin, who returned to Douglas, ill satisfied with the success of his message, but, nevertheless, delivered it faithfully. 'That curst carle,' said the Douglas, 'is a thorn in my thigh, as well as a buckler on my arm. He's as cunning as a fox, as stubborn as an oak, and as fierce as a lion. I must temporize for the present, as I cannot do without his support, but the time may come that he may be humbled, and made to know his betters; since one endeavour has failed, we must try another, and, if that do not succeed, another still.'

The day after that, as Sir Ringan was walking out at his own gate, an old man, with a cowl, and a long grey beard, accosted him. 'May the great spirit of the elements shield thee, and be thy protector, knight,' said he.

'An' wha may he be, carle, an it be your will?' said Ringan; 'An' wha may ye be that gie me sic a sachless benediction? As to my shield and protection, look ye here!' and with that he touched his two-handed sword,

and a sheaf of arrows that was swung at his shoulder; ‘an’ what are all your saints and lang nebbit spirits to me?’

‘It was a random salutation, knight,’ said the old man, seeing his mood and temper; ‘I am not a priest but a prophet. I come not to load you with blessings, curses, nor homilies, all equally unavailing, but to tell you what shall be in the times that are to come. I have had visions of futurity that have torn up the tendrils of my spirit by the roots. Would you like to know what is to befal you and your house in the times that are to come?’

‘I never believe a word that you warlocks say,’ replied the knight; ‘but I like aye to hear what you *will* say about matters; though it is merely to laugh at ye, for I dinna gie credit to ane o’ your predictions. Sin’ the Rhymer’s days, the spirit o’ true warlockry is gane. He foretauld muckle that has turned out true; an’ something that I hope *will* turn out true: But ye’re a’ bairns to him.’

‘Knight,’ said the stranger, ‘I can tell you more than ever the Rhymer conceived, or thought upon; and, moreover, I can explain the words of True Thomas, which neither you nor those to whom they relate in the smallest degree comprehend. Knowest thou the prophecy of the Hart and the Deer, as it is called?

‘Quhere the hearte heavit in het blude over hill and howe,
There shall the dinke deire droule for the dowe:
Two fleite footyde maydenis shall tredde the greine,
And the mone and the starre shall flashe betweine.
Quhere the proude hiche halde and heveye hande beire
Ane frenauch shall feide on ane faderis frene feire,
In dinging at the starris the D shall doupe down,
But the S shall be S quhane the heide S is gone.’

‘I hae heard the reide often and often,’ said the knight, ‘but the man’s unborn that can understand that. Though the prophecies and the legends of the Rhymer take the lead i’ my lear, I hae always been obliged to make that a passover.’

‘There is not one of all his sayings that relates as much to you and your house, knight. It foretels that the arms of your family shall supersede those of Douglas, which you know are the bloody heart; and that in endeavouring

to exalt himself to the stars, the D, that is the Douglas, shall fall, but that your house and name shall remain when the Stuarts are no more.'

'By the horned beasts of Old England, my father's portion, and my son's undiminished hope,' exclaimed the knight – 'Thou art a cunning man! I now see the bearing o' the prophecy as plainly as I see the hill o' Mountcomyn before my e'e; and, as I know Thomas never is wrong, I believe it. Now is the time, auld warlock – now is the time; he's ettling at a king's daughter, but his neck lies in wad, and the forfeit will be his undoing.'

'The time is not yet come, valiant knight; nevertheless the prophecy is true. Has thy horse's hoof ever trode, or thine eye journeyed, over the Nine Glens of Niddisdale?'

'I hae whiles gotten a glisk o' them.'

'They are extensive, rich, and beautiful.'

'They're nae less, auld carle; they're nae less. They can send nine thousand leel men an' stout to the field in a pinch.'

'It is recorded in the book of fate – it is written there—'

'The devil it is, auld carle; that's mair than I thought o'.'

'Hold thy peace: lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and be silent till I explain: I say I have seen it in the visions of the night – I have seen it in the stars of heaven—'

'What? the Nine Glens o' Niddisdale amang the starns o' heaven! by hoof and horn, it was rarely seen, warlock.'

'I say that I have seen it – they are all to belong to thy house.'

'Niddisdale a' to pertain to my house!'

'All.'

'Carle, I gie nae credit to sic forbodings; but I have heard something like this afore. Will ye stay till I bring my son Robin, the young Master of Mountcomyn, and let him hear it? For aince a man takes a mark on his way, I wadna hae him to tine sight o't. Mony a time has the tail o' the king's elwand pointed me the way to Cumberland; an' as often has the ee o' the Charlie-wain blinkit me hame again. A man's nae the waur o' a bit beacon o' some kind – a bit hope set afore him, auld carle; an' the Nine Glens o' Niddisdale are nae Willie-an-the-Wisp in a lad's ee.'

'From Roxburgh castle to the tower of Sark—'

'What's the auld-warld birkie saying?'

‘From the Deadwater-fell to the Linns of Cannoby – from the Linns of Cannoby to the heights of Manor and the Deucharswire – shall thy son, and the representatives of thy house, ride on their own lands.’

‘May ane look at your foot, carle? Take off that huge wooden sandal, an it be your will.’

‘Wherefore should I knight?’

‘Because I dread ye are either the devil or Master Michael Scott.’

‘Whoever I am, I am a friend to you and to yours, and have told you the words of truth. I have but one word more to say: – Act always in concert with the Douglasses, while they act in concert with the king your master – not a day, nor an hour, nor a moment longer. It is thus, and thus alone, that you must rise and the Douglas fall. Remember the words of True Thomas—

‘Quhane the wingit hors at his maistere sal wince,
“Let wyse men cheat the chevysance.”’

‘There is something mair about you than other folk, auld man. If ye be my kinsman, Michael Scott the warlock, I crave your pardon, Master; but if you are that dreadfu’ carle – I mean that learned and wonderfu’ man, why you are welcome to my castle. But you are not to turn my auld wife into a hare, Master, an’ hunt her up an’ down the hills wi’ my ain grews; nor my callants into naigs to scamper about on i’ the night-time when they hae ither occupations to mind. There is naething i’ my tower that isna at your command; for, troth, I wad rather brow a’ the Ha’s and the Howard’s afore I beardit you.’

‘I set no foot in your halls, knight. This night is a night among many to me; and wo would be to me if any thing canopied my head save the cope of heaven. There are horoscopes to be read this night for a thousand years to come. One cake of your bread and one cup of your wine is all that the old wizard requests of you, and that he must have.’

The knight turned back and led the seer into the inner-court, and fed him with bread and wine, and every good thing; but well he noted that he asked no holy benediction on them like the palmers and priors that wandered about the country; and, therefore, he had some lurking dread of the old man. He did not thank the knight for his courtesy, but, wiping his snowy beard, he turned abruptly away, and strode out at the gate of the castle. Sir Ringan

kept an eye on him privately till he saw him reach the top of Blake Law, a small dark hill immediately above the castle. There he stopped and looked around him, and taking two green sods, he placed the one above the other, and laid himself down on his back, resting his head upon the two sods – his body half raised, and his eyes fixed on heaven. The knight was almost frightened to look at him; but sliding into the cleuch, he ran secretly down to the tower to bring his lady to see this wonderful old warlock. When they came back he was gone, and no trace of him to be seen, nor saw they him any more at that time.

CHAPTER 2

This man's the devil's fellow commoner,
A verie cloake-bag of iniquitie.
His batteries and his craboun he deschargeth
Flasche, not by airt or reule. Is it meet
A Ploydenist should be a *cedant arma togae*,
Mounted on a trapt palfrey; with a dishe
Of velvatte on his heide, to keepe the brothe
Of his wit warm? The devil, my maisteris,
There is no dame in Venice shall indure itt.

Old Play

Whilst the knight and his lady were looking about in amazement for their mysterious guest, the tower-warder sounded the great bugle, a tremendous horn that lay on a shelf in the balcony where he kept watch. 'One – two – three,' said the knight, counting the three distinct notes – a signal of which he well knew the language – 'What can that mean? I am wanted it would appear: another messenger from the Douglas, I warrant.'

'Sir Ringan, keep by that is your own,' said the lady – 'I say, mind your own concerns, and let the Douglas mind his.'

'Dame,' said the chief, 'I hae gotten some mair insight into that affair than you; an' we maun talk about it by an' by. In the meantime let us haste home, and see who is arrived.'

As they descended from the hill hand in hand, (for none walked arm in arm in those days,) they saw Richard Dodds, a landward laird, coming to meet them. 'Oh,' said Sir Ringan, 'this is my officious cousin, Dickie o' Dryhope; what business can he be come upon? It will be something that he deems of great importance.'

'I hate that old fawning, flattering sycophant,' said the lady; 'and cannot divine what is the cause of your partiality for him.'

‘It is his attachment to our house that I admire, and his perfect devotion to my service and interests,’ said the knight.

‘Mere sound,’ exclaimed the lady bitterly: ‘Mere waste of superfluous breath! I tell you, Sir Ringan, that, for all your bravery, candour, and kindness, you are a mere novice in the affairs of life, and know less of men and of things than ever knight did.’

‘It is a great fault in women,’ said the knight, making his observation general, ‘that they will aye be meddling wi’ things they ken nought about. They think they ken every thing, an’ wad gar ane trow that they can see an inch into a fir deal –. Gude help them! It is just as unfeasible to hear a lady discussing the merits of warriors an’ yeomen, as it wad be to see me sitting nursing a wench-bairn.’

‘Foh, what an uncourtly term!’ said the lady; ‘What would King Robert think if he heard you speaking in that uncouth stile?’

‘I speak muckle better than him, wi’ his short clippit Highland tongue,’ said the chief: ‘But hush, here comes the redoubted Dickie o’ Dryhope.’

No sooner were the knight and his lady’s eyes turned so as to meet Dickie’s, than he whipped off his bonnet with a graceful swing, and made a low bow, his thin gray locks waving as he bowed. Dickie was a tall, lean, toothless, old bachelor, whose whole soul and body were devoted to the fair sex and the house of his chief. These two mighty concerns divided his attention, and often mingled with one another; his enthusiasm for the one, by any sudden change of subjects or concatenation of ideas, being frequently transferred to the other. Dickie approached with his bonnet in his hand, bowing every time the knight and lady lifted their eyes. When they met, Sir Ringan shook him heartily by the hand, and welcomed him to the castle of Mountcomyn.

‘Oh, you are so good and so kind, Sir Ringan, bless you, bless you, bless you, noble sir; how do you thrive, Sir Ringan? bless you, bless you. And my excellent and noble Lady Mountcomyn, how is my noble dame?’

‘Thank you,’ said the lady coldly.

Dickie looked as if he would have shaken hands with her, or embraced her, as the custom then was, but she made no proffer of either the one or the other, and he was obliged to keep his distance; but this had no effect in checking his adulations. ‘I am so glad that my excellent lady is well, and the young squires and maidens all brisk and whole I hope?’

‘All well, cousin,’ said the chief.

‘Eh! all well?’ reiterated Dickie, ‘Oh the dear, delightful, darling souls, O bless them! If they be but as well as I wish them, and as good as I wish – If the squires be but half so brave as their father, and the noble young sweet dames half so beautiful as their lady mother – oh bless them, bless them.’

‘And half so independent and honest as their cousin,’ said the lady, with a rebuking sneer.

‘Very pleasant! very pleasant, indeed!’ simpered Dickie, without daring to take his lips far asunder, lest his toothless gums should be seen.

‘Such babyish flummery!’ rejoined the lady with great emphasis. Dickie was somewhat abashed. His eyes, that were kindled with a glow of filial rapture, appeared as with flattened pupils; nevertheless the benignant smile did not altogether desert his features. The knight gave a short look off at one side to his lady. ‘It is a great fault in ladies, cousin,’ said he, ‘that they will always be breaking their jokes on those that they like best, and always pretending to keep at a distance from them. My lady thinks to blind my een, as many a dame has done to her husband afore this time; but I ken, an’ some mae ken too, that if there’s ane o’ a’ my kin that I durstna trust my lady wi’ when my back’s turned, that ane’s Dickie o’ Dryhope.’

‘H’m, h’m, h’m,’ neighed Dickie, laughing with his lips shut; ‘My lady’s so pleasant, and so kind, but – Oh – no, no – you wrong her, knight; h’m, h’m, h’m! But, all joking and gibing aside – my lady’s *very* pleasant. I came express to inform you, Sir Ringan, that the Douglasses are up.’

‘I knew it.’

‘And the Maxwells – and the Gordons – and the hurkle-backed Hendersons.’

‘Well.’

‘And Sir Christopher Seton is up – and the Elliots and the Laird of Tibbers is up.’

‘Well, well.’

‘I came expressly to inform you—’

‘Came with piper’s news,’ said the lady, ‘which the fiddler has told before you.’

‘That *is very* good,’ said Dickie, ‘My lady is so delightfully pleasant – I thought Sir Ringan would be going to rise with the rest, and came for directions as to raising my men.’

‘How many men can the powerful Laird of Dryhope muster in support of the warden?’ said Lady Mountcomyn.

‘Mine are all at his command; my worthy lady knows that,’ said Dickie, bowing: ‘Every one at his command.’

‘I think,’ said she, ‘that at the battle of Blakehope you furnished only two, who were so famished with hunger that they could not bear arms, far less fight.’

‘Very pleasant, in sooth; h’m, h’m! I declare I am delighted with my lady’s good humour.’

‘You may, however, keep your couple of scare-crows at home for the present, and give them something to eat,’ continued she; ‘the warden has other matters to mind than wasting his vassals that the Douglas may wive.’

‘Very true, and excellent good sense,’ said Dickie.

‘We’ll talk of that anon,’ said Sir Ringan. And with that they went into the castle, and sat down to dinner. There were twelve gentlemen and nine maidens present, exclusive of the knight’s own family, and they took their places on each side as the lady named them. When Sir Ringan lifted up his eyes and saw the station that Dickie occupied, he was dissatisfied, but instantly found a remedy. ‘Davie’s Pate,’ said he to the lad that waited behind him, ‘mak that bowiefu’ o’ cauld plovers change places wi’ yon saut-faut instantly, before meat be put to mouth.’ The order was no sooner given than obeyed, and the new arrangement placed Dickie fairly above the salt.

The dining apparatus at the castle of Mountcomyn was homely, but the fare was abundant. A dozen yeomen stood behind with long knives, and slashed down the beef and venison into small pieces, which they placed before the guests in wooden plates, so that there was no knife used at the dining board. All ate heartily, but none with more industry than Dickie, who took not even time all the while to make the complaisant observation, that ‘my lady was so pleasant.’

Dinner being over, the younger branches of the family retired, and all the kinsmen not of the first rank, pretending some business that called them away, likewise disappeared; so that none were left with the knight and his lady save six. The lady tried the effect of several broad hints on Dickie, but he took them all in good part, and declared that he never saw his lady so pleasant in his life. And now a serious consultation ensued, on the propriety of lending assistance to the Douglas. Sir Ringan first put the question to his

friends, without any observation. The lady took up the argument, and reasoned strongly against the measure. Dickie was in raptures with his lady's good sense, and declared her arguments unanswerable. Most of the gentlemen seemed to acquiesce in the same measure, on the ground that, as matters stood, they could not rise at the Douglas' call on that occasion, without being considered as a subordinate family, which neither the king nor the Douglas had any right to suppose them; and so strongly and warmly ran the argument on that side, that it was likely to be decided on, without the chief having said a word on the subject. Simon of Gemelscleuch alone ventured to dissent; 'I have only to remark, my gallant kinsmen,' said he, 'that our decision in this matter is likely to prove highly eventful. Without our aid the force of the Douglas is incompetent to the task, and the castle will then remain in the hands of the English, than which nothing can be more grievously against our interest. If he be defeated, and forfeit his lands, the power of the Border will then remain with us; but should he succeed without our assistance, and become the king's son-in-law, it will be a hard game with us to keep the footing that we have. I conceive, therefore, that in withdrawing our support we risk every thing – in lending it, we risk nothing but blows.' All the kinsmen were silent. Dickie looked at my Lady Mountcomyn.

'It is well known that there is an old prophecy existing,' said she, 'that a Scott shall sit in the Douglas' chair, and be lord of all his domains. Well would it be for the country if that were so. But to support the overgrown power of that house is not the way to accomplish so desirable an object.'

'That is true,' said Dickie; 'I'll defy any man to go beyond what my lady says, or indeed whatever she says.'

'Have we not had instances of their jealousy already?' continued she.

'We have had instances of their jealousy already,' said Dickie, interrupting her.

'And should we raise him to be the king's son-in-law, he would kick us for our pains,' rejoined she.

'Ay, he would kick us for our pains,' said Dickie; 'think of that.'

'Either please to drop your responses, Sir,' said she, sternly, 'or leave the hall. I would rather hear a raven croak on my turret in the day of battle, than the tongue of a flatterer or sycophant.'

‘That is very good indeed,’ said Dickie; ‘My lady is so pleasant; h’m, h’m, h’m! Excellent! h’m, h’m, h’m!’

Sir Ringan saw his lady drawing herself up in high indignation; and dreading that his poor kinsman would bring on himself such a rebuke as would banish him the hall for ever, he interposed. ‘Cousin,’ said he, ‘it’s a great fault in women that they canna bide interruption, an’ the mair they stand in need o’t they take it the waur. But I have not told you all yet: a very singular circumstance has happened to me this day. Who do you think I found waylaying me at my gate, but our kinsman, the powerful old warlock, Master Michael Scott.’

‘Master Michael Scott!’ exclaimed the whole circle, every one holding up his hands, ‘has he ventured to be seen by man once more? Then there is something uncommon to befal, or, perhaps, the world is coming to an end.’

‘God forbid!’ said Redhough: ‘It is true that, for seven years, he has been pent up in his enchanted tower at Aikwood, without speaking to anyone save his spirits; but though I do not know him, this must have been he, for he has told me such things as will astonish you; and, moreover, when he left me, he laid himself down on the top of the Little Law on his back, and the devils carried him away bodily through the air, or down through the earth, and I saw no more of him.’

All agreed that it had been the great magician Master Michael Scott. Sir Ringan then rehearsed the conversation that had passed between the wizard and himself. All the circle heard this with astonishment; some with suspense, and others with conviction, but Dickie with raptures of delight. ‘He assured me,’ said Redhough, ‘that my son should ride on his own land from Roxburgh to the Deadwater-fell.’

‘From Roxburgh to the Deadwater-fell!’ cried Dickie, ‘think of that! all the links of the bonny Teviot and Slitterick, ha, ha, lads, think of that!’ and he clapped his hands aloud without daring to turn his eyes to the head of the table.

‘And from the Deadwater-fell to the tower o’ Sark,’ rejoined the knight.

‘To the tower of Sark!’ exclaimed Dickie. ‘H – have a care of us! think of that! All the dales of Liddel, and Ewes, and the fertile fields of Cannobie! Who will be king of the Border, then, my lads? who will be king of the Border then? ha, ha, ha!’

‘And from the fords of Sark to the Deuchar-swire,’ added Sir Ringan.

Dickie sprang to his feet, and seizing a huge timber trencher, he waved it round his head. The chief beckoned for silence; but Dickie's eyes were glistening with raptures, and it was with great difficulty he repressed his vociferations.

'And over the Nine Glens of Niddisdale beside,' said Sir Ringan.

Dickie could be restrained no longer. He brayed out, 'Hurrah, hurrah!' and waved his trencher round his head.

'All the Esk, and the braid Forest, and the Nine Glens o' Niddisdale! Hurrah! Hurrah! Mountcomyn for ever! The warden for ever! hu, hu! hu!'

The knight and his friends were obliged to smile at Dickie's outrageous joy; but the lady rose and went out in high dudgeon. Dickie then gave full vent to his rapture without any mitigation of voice, adding, 'My lady for ever!' to the former two; and so shouting, he danced around, waving his immense wooden plate.

The frolic did not take, and Sir Ringan was obliged to call him to order. 'You do not consider, cousin,' said the warden, 'that what a woman accounts excellent sport at one time is at another high offence. See, now, you have driven my lady away from our consultation, on whose advice I have a strong reliance; and I am afraid we will scarcely prevail on her to come back.'

'Oh! there's no fear of my lady and me,' said Dickie; 'we understand one another. My lady is a kind, generous, noble soul, and so pleasant!'

'For as pleasant and kind as she is, I am deceived if she is easily reconciled to you. Ye dinna ken Kate Dunbar, cousin –. Boy, tell your lady that we lack her counsel, and expect that she will lend us it for a short space.'

The boy did as he was ordered, but returned with an answer, that unless Dickie was dismissed she did not choose to be of the party.

'I am sorry for it,' said Sir Ringan; 'but you may tell her that she may then remain where she is, for I can't spare my cousin Dickie now, nor any day these five months.' And with that he began and discussed the merits of the case *pro* and *con* with his kinsmen, as if nothing had happened; and in the end it was resolved, that, with a thousand horsemen, they would scour the east border to intercept all the supplies that should be sent out of England, and thus enrich themselves, while, at the same time, they would appear to countenance the mad undertaking of Douglas.

CHAPTER 3

> ‘Come, come, my hearts of flint; modestly; decently; soberly; and handsomely –. No man afore his leader –. Ding down the enemy to-morrow – ye shall not come into the field like beggars –. Lord have mercy upon me, what a world this is! – Well, I’ll give an hundred pence for as many good feathers, and a hundred more for as many scarts: – wounds, dogs, to set you out withal! Frost and snow, a man cannot fight till he be brave! I say down with the enemy to-morrow!’
>
> *Sir John Oldcastle*

The castle of Roxburgh was beleaguered by seven thousand men in armour, but never before had it been so well manned, or rendered so formidable in its butresses; and to endeavour to scale it, appeared as vain an attempt as that of scaling the moon.

There was a great deal of parading, and noise went on, as that of beating drums, and sounding of trumpets and bugles, every day; and scarcely did there one pass on which there were not tilting bouts between the parties, and in these the English generally had the advantage. Never was there, perhaps, a more chivalrous host than that which Musgrave had under his command within the walls of Roxburgh; the enthusiasm, the gallantry, and the fire of the captain, were communicated to all the train.

Their horses were much superior to those of the Scots; and, in place of the latter being able to make any impression on the besieged, they could not, with all the vigilance they were able to use, prevent their posts from being surprised by the English, on which the most desperate encounters sometimes took place. At first the English generally prevailed, but the Scots at length became inured to it, and stood the shocks of the cavalry more firmly. They took care always at the first onset to cut the bridle reins with their broad-swords, and by that means they disordered the ranks of their enemies, and often drove them in confusion back to their stronghold.

Thus months flew on in this dashing sort of warfare, and no impression was made on the fortress, nor did any appear practicable; and every one at

court began to calculate on the failure and utter ruin of the Douglas. Piercy of Northumberland proffered to raise the country, and lead an army to the relief of the castle; but this interference Musgrave would in nowise admit, it being an infringement of the task imposed on him by his mistress.

Moreover, he said, he cared not if all the men of Scotland lay around the castle, for he would defy them to win it. He farther bade the messenger charge Piercy and Howard to have an army ready at the expiry of the Christmas holidays, wherewith to relieve him, and clear the Border, but to take no care nor concern about him till then.

About this time an incident, right common in that day, brought a number of noble young adventurers to the camp of Douglas. It chanced, in an encounter between two small rival parties at the back of the convent of Maisondieu, which stood on the south side of the Teviot, that Sir Thomas de Somerville of Carnwath engaged hand to hand with an English knight, named Sir Comes de Moubray, who, after a desperate encounter, unhorsed and wounded him. The affair was seen from the walls of Roxburgh, as well as by a part of the Scottish army which was encamped on a rising ground to the south, that overlooked the plain; and, of course, like all other chivalrous feats, became the subject of general conversation. Somerville was greatly mortified; and, not finding any other way to recover his honour, he sent a challenge to Moubray to fight him again before the gate of Roxburgh, in sight of both armies. Moubray was too gallant to refuse. There was not a knight in the castle who would have declined such a chance of earning fame, and recommending himself to his mistress and the fair in general. The challenge was joyfully accepted, and the two knights met in the midst of a circle of gentlemen appointed by both armies, on the castle green, that lay betwixt the moat and the river, immediately under the walls of the castle. Never was there a more gallant combat seen. They rode nine times against each other with full force, twice with lances and seven times with swords, yet always managed with such dexterity that neither were unhorsed, nor yet materially wounded. But at the tenth charge, by a most strenuous exertion, Sir Thomas disarmed and threw his opponent out of his saddle, with his sword-arm dislocated. Somerville gained great renown, and his fame was sounded in court and in camp. Other challenges were soon sent from both sides, and as readily accepted; and some of the best blood both of Scotland and England was shed in these mad chivalrous exploits. The ambition of the

young Scottish nobles was roused, and many of them flocked as volunteers to the standard of Douglas. Among these were some of the retainers of Redhough, who could not resist such an opportunity of trying their swords with some rivals with whom they had erst exchanged sharp blows on the marches. Simon of Gemelscleuch, his cousin John of Howpasley, and the Laird of Yardbire, all arrived in the camp of Douglas in one night, in order to distinguish themselves in these tilting bouts. Earl Douglas himself challenged Musgrave, hoping thereby to gain his end, and the prize for which he fought; but the knight, true to his engagement, sent him for answer, that he would first see the beginning of a new year, and then he should fight either him or any of his name, but that till then he had undertaken a charge to which all others must be subordinate.

The Laird of Yardbire, the strongest man of the Border, fought three combats with English squires of the same degree, two on horseback and one on foot, and in all proved victorious. For one whole month the siege presented nothing new save these tiltings, which began at certain hours every day, and always became more obstinate, often proving fatal; and the eagerness of the young gentry of both parties to engage in them grew into a kind of mania: But an event happened which put an end to them at once.

There was a combat one day between two knights of the first degree, who were surrounded as usual by twenty lancers from each army, all the rest of both parties being kept at a distance, the English on the tops of their walls, and the Scots on the heights behind, both to the east and west; for there was one division of the army stationed on the hill of Barns and at the head of the Sick-man's Path, and another on the rising ground between the city and castle. The two gentlemen were equally matched, and the issue was doubtful, when the attendant Scottish guards perceived, or thought they perceived, in the bearing of the English knight, some breach of the rules of chivalry; on which with one voice they called out 'foul play.' The English answered, 'No, no, none.' The two judges called to order, on which the spearmen stood still and listened, and hearing that the judges too were of different opinions, they took up the matter themselves, the Scots insisting that the knight should be disarmed and turned from the lists in disgrace, and the English refusing to acquiesce. The judges, dreading some fatal conclusion, gave their joint orders that both parties should retire in peace, and let the matter be judged of afterwards; on which the English prepared to

quit the ground with a kind of exultation, for it appeared that they were not certain with regard to the propriety of their hero's conduct. Unluckily, it so happened that the redoubted Charlie Scott of Yardbire headed the Scottish pike-men on the lists that day, a very devil for blood and battery, and of strength much beyond that generally allotted to man. When he saw that the insidious knight was going to be conducted off in a sort of triumph, and in a manner so different from what he deemed to suit his demerits, he clenched the handle of his sword with his right hand, and screwed down his eyebrows till they almost touched the top of his nose. 'What now, muckle Charlie?' said one that stood by him. 'What now!' repeated Charlie, growling like a wolf-dog, and confining the words almost within his own breast, 'The deil sal bake me into a ker-cake to gust his gab wi', afore I see that saucy tike ta'en off in sic a way.' And with that he dropt his pike, drew his sword, and rushing through the group he seized the knight's horse by the bridle with his left hand, thinking to lead both him and his master away prisoners. The knight struck at him with all his might, but for this Charlie was prepared; he warded the blow most dexterously, and in wrath, by the help of a huge curb-bridle, he threw the horse backward, first on his hams, and then on his back, with his rider under him. 'Tak ye that, master, for whistling o' Sundays,' said the intrepid borderer, and began to lay about him at the English, who now attacked him on both sides.

Charlie's first break at the English knight was the watchword for a general attack. The Scots flew to the combat, in perfect silence, and determined hatred, and they were received by the other party in the same manner. Not so the onlookers of both hosts – they rent the air with loud and reiterated shouts. The English poured forth in a small narrow column from the east gate along the draw-bridge, but the Scottish horsemen, who were all ready mounted, the better to see the encounter from their stations, scoured down from the heights like lightning, so that they prevailed at first, before the English could issue forth in numbers sufficient to oppose them. The brave Sir Richard Musgrave, the captain's younger brother, led the English, he having rushed out at their head on the first breaking out of the affray; but, notwithstanding all his bravery, he with his party were driven with their backs to the moat, and hard pressed, Douglas, with a strong body of horse, having got betwixt them and the castle-gate. The English were so anxious to relieve their young hero that they rushed to the gate in crowds.

Douglas suffered a part to issue, and then attacking them furiously with the cavalry, he drove them back in such confusion, that he got possession of the drawbridge for several minutes, and would in all likelihood have entered with the crowd, had it not been for the portcullis, the machinery of which the Scots did not understand, nor had they the means of counteracting it; so that just when they were in the hottest and most sanguine part of their enterprise, down it came with a clattering noise louder than thunder, separating a few of the most forward from their brethren, who were soon every one cut down, as they refused to yield.

In the meantime it fared hard with Richard, who was overpowered by numbers; and though the English archers galled the Scottish cavalry grievously from the walls, he and all that were with him being forced backward, they plunged into the moat, and were every one of them either slain or taken prisoners. The younger Musgrave was among the latter, which grieved his brother Sir Philip exceedingly, as it gave Douglas an undue advantage over him, and he knew that, in the desperate state of his undertaking, he would go any lengths to over-reach him. From that day forth, all challenges or accepting of challenges was prohibited by Musgrave, under pain of death; and a proclamation was issued, stating, that all who entered the castle should be stripped naked, searched, and examined, on what pretence soever they came, and if any suspicious circumstances appeared against them, they were to be hanged upon a post erected for the purpose, on the top of the wall, in sight of both armies. He was determined to spare no vigilance, and constantly said he would hold Douglas at defiance.

There was only one thing that the besieged had to dread, and it was haply, too, the only thing in which the Scots placed any degree of hope, and that was the total failure of provisions within the castle. Musgrave's plan, of getting small supplies at a time from England by night, was discovered by Sir Ringan Redhough, and completely cut off: and as Douglas hanged every messenger that fell into his hands, no new plan could be established; and so closely were the English beleaguered, that any attempt at sending additional supplies to those they had proved of no avail. The rival armies always grew more and more inveterate against each other, and the most sharp and deadly measures were exercised by both. Matters went on in this manner till near the end of October, when the nights grew cold, long, and dark. There was

nothing but the perils of that castle on the Border talked of over all Scotland and England. Every one, man, maid, and child, became interested in it. It may well be conceived that the two sovereign beauties, the Lady Jane Howard and Princess Margaret of Scotland, were not the least so; and both of them prepared, at the same time, in the true spirit of the age, to take some active part in the matter before it came to a final issue. One of them seemed destined to lose her hero, but both had put on the resolution of performing something worthy of the knights that were enduring so much for their sakes.

CHAPTER 4

And O that pegis weste is slymme,
And his ee wald garr the daye luke dymme;
His broue is brente, his brestis fayre,
And the deemonde lurkis in hys revan hayre.
Alake for thilke bonnye boye sae leile
That lyes withe oure Kynge in the hie-lande shiele!

Old Rhyme

I winna gang in, I darena gang in,
Nor sleep i' your arms ava;
Fu' laithly wad a fair may sleep
Atween you an' the wa'.
War I to lie wi' a belted knight,
In a land that's no my ain,
Fu' dear wad be my courtesye,
An' dreich wad be my pain.

Old Ballad

One cold biting evening, at the beginning of November, Patrick Chisholm of Castleweary, an old yeoman in the upper part of Teviotdale, sat conversing with his family all in a merry and cheerful mood. They were placed in a circle round a blazing hearth fire, on which hung a huge caldron, boiling and bubbling like the pool at the foot of a cataract. The lid was suspended by a rope to the iron crook on which this lordly machine was hung, to intercept somewhat the showers of soot that now and then descended from the rafters. These appeared as if they had been covered with pitch or black japanning; and so violently was the kettle boiling, that it made the roof of Pate Chisholm's bigging all to shiver. Notwithstanding these showers of soot, Pate and his four goodly sons eyed the boiling caldron with looks of great satisfaction – for ever and anon the hough of an immense leg of beef was to be seen cutting its capers in the boil, or coming with a graceful semicircular sweep from one lip of the pot to the other.

‘Is it true, callants,’ said Pate, ‘that Howard is gaun to make a diversion, as they ca’t, in the west border, to draw off the warden frae the Cheviots?’

‘As muckle is said, an’ as muckle expectit,’ said Dan, his first born, a goodly youth, who, with his three brethren, sat in armour. They had come home to their father’s house that night with their share of a rich prey that the warden had kidnapped while just collecting to send to Roxburgh under a guard of five thousand men. But Sir Ringan, getting intelligence of it, took possession of the drove before it was placed under the charge of those intended to guard it.

‘As muckle is said, an’ as muckle is expectit,’ said Dan; ‘but the west border will never turn out sae weel to us as the east has done. It’s o’er near the Johnstones, and the Jardines, and the hurkle-backit Hendersons.’

Pate looked from under his bonnet at the hough of beef –. ‘The Cheviot hills hae turned weel out for the warden,’ continued Dan; ‘Redhough an’ his lads hae been as weel scrieving o’er law and dale as lying getting hard pelts round the stane wa’s o’ Roxburgh, an’ muckle mair gude has he done; for gin they dinna hunger them out o’ their hauddin, they’ll keep it. Ye’ll draw an Englishman by the gab easier than drive him wi’ an airn gaud. I wad ride fifty miles to see ony ane o’ the bonny dames that a’ this pelting an’ peching is about.’

‘Twa wanton glaikit gillies, I’ll uphaud,’ said Pate, looking at the restless hough; ‘o’er muckle marth i’ the back, an’ meldar i’ the brusket. Gin I had the heffing o’ them, I sude tak a staup out o’ their bickers –. Whisht, I thought I heard the clanking o’ horse heels –. Callant, clap the lid down on the pat; what hae they’t hinging geaving up there for?’

The clattering of the horses approached, but apparently with caution; and at length a voice called at the door in an English accent, ‘Hollo, who holds here?’ ‘Leel men, an’ for the Scots,’ answered Dan, starting to his feet, and laying his hand on his sword. ‘For the knight of Mountcomyn, the Scottish warden?’ – inquired the horse-man without. ‘For the same,’ was the answer. ‘It is toward his castle that we are bound. Can any of you direct us the way?’

‘Troth, that I can,’ said old Pate, groping to satisfy himself that the lid was close down on the pot, and then running to the door; ‘I can tell you every fit o’ the road, masters: You maun gang by the Fanesh, you see; it lies yon way, you see; an’ then up the Brown rig, as straight as a line through

Philhope-head, an' into Borthwick; then up Aitas-burn – round the Crib-law – an' wheel to the right; then the burn that ye come to there, ye maun cross that, and three miles farther on you come to the castle of Mountcomyn –. Braw cheer there lads!'

'I am afraid, friend,' said the English trooper, 'we will make nothing of this direction. Is it far to this same castle of the Scottish warden?'

'O no, naething but a step, some three Scots miles.'

'And how is the road?'

'A prime road, man; no a step in't a' wad tak your horse to the brusket; only there's nae track; ye maun just take an ettle. Keep an ee on the tail o' Charlie's wain, an' ye'll no gang far wrang.'

'Our young lord and master is much fatigued,' said the trooper; 'I am afraid we shall scarcely make it out. Pray, sir, could you spare us a guide?'

Dan, who was listening behind, now stepped forward, and addressed them: 'My masters, as the night is o' darkness, I could hardly ride to Mountcomyn mysel, an', far or near, I couldna win there afore day. Gin ye dought accept o' my father's humble cheer the night—'

'The callant's bewiddied, an' waur than bewiddied,' said Pate: 'We haena cheer for oursels, let abe for a byking o' English lords an' squires!'

'I would gladly accept of any accommodation,' said a sweet delicate voice, like that of a boy; 'for the path has been so dreadful that I am almost dead, and unable to proceed further. I have a safe-conduct to the Scottish court, signed by all the wardens of the marches, and every knight, yeoman, and vassal is obliged to give me furtherance.'

'I dinna ken muckle about conducks an' signatures,' said Pate, 'but I trow there winna be mony syllables in some o' the names if a' the wardens hae signed your libelt; for I ken weel there's ane o' them whase edication brak aff at the letter G, an' never gat farrer. But I'm no ca'ing ye a leear, southron lord, ye may be a vera honest man; an' as your errand may be something unco express, ye had better post on.'

'It sal never be casten up to me neither in camp nor ha,' said Dan, 'that a stranger was cawed frae my auld father's door at this time o' the night. Light down, light down, southron lord, ye are a privileged man; an', as I like to see the meaning o' things, I'll ride wi' ye mysel the morn, fit for fit, to the castle o' Mountcomyn.'

The strangers were soon all on their feet, and ushered into the family circle, for there was no fire-place in the house but that one. They consisted of five stout troopers, well armed, a page, and a young nobleman, having the appearance of a youth about seventeen or eighteen years of age. Every eye was instantly turned on him, there was something so extraordinary in his appearance. Instead of a steel helmet, he wore a velvet cap, shaped like a crown, striped with belts, bars, and crosses of gold wire, and manifestly more for ornament than use. His fair ringlets were peeping in curls out from below his cap, and his face and bright blue eyes were lovely as the dawn of a summer's morning.

They were not well seated till a noise of the tread of horses was again heard.

'The warld be a-wastle us!' cried old Pate, 'wha's that now? I think fouk will be eaten up wi' fouk, an' naething for fouk's pains but dry thanks; – thanks winna feed the cat—'

He was stopped in his regretful soliloquy by a rough voice at the door: 'Ho, wha hauds the house?' The same answer was given as to the former party, and in a minute the strangers entered without law or leave.

'Ye travel unco late, maisters,' said old Pate: 'How far may ye be for the night?'

'We meant to have reached the tower of Gorranberry tonight,' said one of the strangers, 'but we have been benighted, and were drawn hither by the light in your bole. I fear we must draw on your hospitality till day.'

'Callant Peter, gang an' stap a wisp i' that bole,' said Pate; 'it seems to be the beacon light to a' the clanjaumphry i' the hale country. I tauld ye aye to big it up; but no ane o' ye heeds what I say. I hae seen houses that *some* fouk whiles gaed by. But, my maisters, its nae gate ava to Gorranberry – a mere haut-stride-and-loup. I'll send a guide to Bilhope-head wi' ye; for troth we hae neither meat nor drink, house-room nor stabling, mair about the toun. We're but poor yeomen, an' haud our mailin for hard service. We hae tholed a foray the night already, an' a double ane wad herrie us out o' house an' hauld. The warld be a' wastle us! I think a' the mosstroopers be abraid the night! Bairns, swee that bouking o' claes aff the fire; ye'll burn it i' the boiling.'

The new comers paid little attention to this address of the old man; they saw that he was superannuated, and had all the narrow selfishness that too

generally clings to that last miserable stage of human existence; but drawing nigh they began to eye the southron party with looks of dark suspicion, if not of fierceness.

‘I see what maks ye sae frightet at our entrance here,’ said the first Scots trooper, ‘ye hae some southron spies amang ye – Gudeman, ye sal answer to the king for this, an’ to the Douglas too, whilk ye’ll find a waur job.’

‘Ken where ye are, an’ wha ye’re speaking to,’ said Dan, stepping forward and browing the last speaker face to face: ‘If either the ae party or the ither be spies, or aught else but leel men, ye shall find, ere ye gang far, whase land ye are on, an’ whase kipples ye are under. That auld man’s my father, an’, doitet as he is, the man amang ye that says a saucy word to him I’ll gar sleep in his shoon a fit shorter than he rase i’ the morning. Wha are ye, sir, or where do you travel by night on my master the warden’s bounds?’

‘Sir,’ answered another trooper, who seemed to be rather a more polished man, ‘I applaud your spirit, and will answer your demand. We go with our lord and master, Prince Alexander Stuart of Scotland, on a mission to a noble English family. Here is the king’s seal as well as a pass signed by the English warden. We are leel men and true.’

‘Where is the prince?’ said Dan: ‘A prince of Scotland i’ my father’s house? Which is he?’

A slender elegant stripling stept forward. ‘Here he is, brave yeoman,’ said the youth: ‘No ceremony – Regard me as your fellow and companion for this night.’

Dan whipped off his bonnet and clapped his foot upon it, and bowing low and awkwardly to his prince he expressed his humble respect as well as he could, and then presented the prince to his father. The title sounded high in the old man’s ears, he pulled off his bonnet and looked with an unsteady gaze, as if uncertain on whom to fix it – ‘A prince! Eh? – Is he a prince o’ Scotland? Ay, ay!’ said he, ‘Then he’ll maybe hae some say wi’ our head men – Dan – I say, Dan’ – and with that he pulled Dan’s sleeve, and said in a whisper loud enough to be heard over all the house – ‘I say, Dan, man, gin he wad but speak to the warden to let us hae a’ the land west the length o’ the Frosty lair. O it wad lie weel into ours.’ ‘It wad, father, and I daresay we may get it; but hush just now.’ ‘Eh? do you think we may get it?’ enquired the old man eagerly in the same whispering tremulous voice, ‘O man, it wad lie weel in; an’ sae wad Couter’s-cleuch. It’s no perfect wanting that

too. An' we wad be a great deal the better o' twa or three rigs aff Skelfhill for a bit downfa' to the south – See if ye can speak to the lad.'

Dan shook his father's hand, and nodded to him by way of acquiescence. The old man brightened up: 'Whar is your titty Bessy, Dan? Whar are a' the idle hizzies? Gar them get something set down to the princely lad: I'se warrant he's e'en hungry. Ye'll no be used til siccan roads as thir, Sir? Na, na. They're unco roads for a prince –. Dan, I say, come this way; I want to speak to you – I say,' (whispering very low aside) 'I wadna let them ken o' the beef, or they'll just gang wi't. Gie them milk an' bread, an' cheese, an' a drap o' the broo; it will do weel aneuch. Hunger's good sauce. But, Dan – I say, could ye no contrive to get quat o' thae English? I doubt there will be little made o' them –. They're but a wheen gillie-gaupies at the best, an nae freends to us –. Fouk sude ay bow to the bush they get bield frae.'

'It's a' true that ye say, father; but we surely needna grudge an Englishman a piece o' an English cow's hip –. The beef didna cost you dear, an' there's mair where it cam frae.'

The old man would not give up his point, but persisted in saying it was a dangerous experiment, and an unprofitable waste. However, in spite of his remonstrances, the board was loaded with six wooden bickers filled with beef broth, plenty of bear-meal bannocks, and a full quarter of English ox beef, to which the travellers did all manner of justice. The prince, as he called himself, was placed at the head of the table, and the young English nobleman by his side. Their eyes were scarcely ever turned from one another's faces, unless in a casual hasty glance to see how others were regarding the same face. The prince had dark raven hair that parted on a brow of snow, a black liquid eye, and round lips, purer than the cherry about to fall from the tree with ripeness. He was also a degree taller than the English lord; but both of them, as well as their two pages, were lovelier than it became men to be. The troopers who attended them seemed disposed to contradict every thing that came from the adverse party, and, if possible, to broach a quarrel, had it not been for the two knights, who were all suavity, good breeding, and kindness to each other, and seemed to have formed an attachment at first sight. At length Prince Alexander inquired of his new associate his name, and business at the Scottish court, provided, he said, that it did not require strict secrecy. The other said, he would tell him

every thing truly, on condition that he would do the same: which being agreed to, the young English nobleman proceeded as follows:

‘My name is Lord Jasper Tudor, second son to the Earl of Pembroke. I am nearly related to the throne of England, and in high favour with the king. The wars on the Borders have greatly harassed the English dalesmen for these many years, and matters being still getting worse between the nations, the king, my cousin, has proposed to me to marry the Princess Margaret of Scotland, and obtain as her dowry a confirmation of these border lands and castles, so that a permanent peace may be established between the nations, and this bloody and desperate work cease. I am on my way to the Scottish court to see the princess, your sister; and if I find her to be as lovely and accomplished as fame speaks her, I intend to comply with the king’s request, and marry her forthwith.’

This speech affected the prince so much that all the guests wondered. He started to his feet, and smiling in astonishment said, ‘What, you? you marry m – m – my sister Margaret? She is very much beholden to you, and on my word she will see a becoming youth. But are you sure that she will accept of you for a husband?’ ‘I have little to fear on that head,’ said the Lord Jasper Tudor jeeringly; ‘Maids are in general not much averse to marriage; and, if I am well informed, your lovely sister is as little averse to it as any of her contemporaries.’

The prince blushed deep at this character of his sister, but had not a word to say.

‘Pray,’ continued Tudor, ‘is she like you? If she is, I think I shall love her – I would not have her just like you neither.’

‘I believe,’ said the prince, ‘there is a strong family likeness; but tell me in what features you would wish her to differ from me, and I will describe her minutely to you.’

‘In the first place,’ said the amorous and blue-ey’d Tudor, ‘I should like her to be a little stouter, and more manly of frame than you, and, at least, to have some appearance of a beard.’

All the circle stared. ‘The devil you would, my lord,’ said Dan; ‘Wad ye like your wife to hae a beard, in earnest? Gude faith, an your ain war like mine, ye wad think ye had eneuch o’t foreby your wife’s.’ The prince held up his hands in astonishment, and the young English lord blushed deeper than it behoved a knight to do; but at length he tried to laugh it by,

pretending that he had unwittingly said one thing when he meant the very contrary, for he wished her to be more feminine, and have less beard –. ‘I think that will hardly be possible,’ said Dan; ‘but perhaps there may be a hair here an’ there on my lord the prince’s chin, when ane comes near it. I wadna disparage ony man, far less my king’s son.’

‘Well, my noble lord,’ said the prince, ‘your tale has not a little surprised me, as well it may. Our meeting here in like circumstances is the most curious rencounter I ever knew; for, to tell you the plain truth, I am likewise on an errand of the same import, being thus far on my way to see and court the lady Jane Howard, in order that all her wide domains may be attached to my father’s kingdom, and peace and amity thereby established on the border.’

‘Gracious heaven!’ said young Lord Tudor, ‘can this that I hear be true? You? Are you on your way to my cousin, the lady Jane Howard? Why, do you not know that she is already affianced to Lord Musgrave?’

‘Yes, it is certain I do; but that is one of my principal inducements to gain her from him; that is quite in the true spirit of gallantry; but, save her great riches, I am told she has little else to recommend her,’ said the prince.

‘And, pray, how does fame report of my cousin Jane?’ said Tudor.

‘As of a shrew and a coquette,’ answered the prince; ‘a wicked minx, that is intemperate in all her passions.’

‘It is a manifest falsehood,’ said Tudor, his face glowing with resentment, ‘I never knew a young lady so moderate and chastened in every passion of the female heart. Her most private thoughts are pure as purity itself, and her –.’

‘But, begging your pardon, my lord, how can you possibly know all this?’ said the prince.

‘I do know it,’ said the other, ‘it is no matter how: I cannot hear my fair cousin wronged; and I know that she will remain true to Musgrave, and have nothing to do with you.’

‘I will bet an earldom on that head,’ said the prince, ‘if I chuse to lay siege to her.’

‘Done!’ said the other, and they joined hands on the bargain; but they had no sooner laid their hands into one another’s than they hastily withdrew them, with a sort of trepidation, that none of the lookers on, save the two pages, who kept close by their masters, appeared to comprehend. They, too,

were both mistaken in the real cause; but of that it does not behove to speak at present.

‘I will let you see,’ said the prince, recovering himself, ‘that this celebrated cousin of yours shall not be so ill to win as the castle of Roxburgh; and I’ll let Musgrave see for how much truth and virgin fidelity he has put his life in his hand; and when I have her I’ll cage her, for I don’t like her. I would give that same earldom to have her in my power to-night.’

The young Lord Tudor looked about as if he meditated an escape to another part of the table; but, after a touch that his page gave him on the sleeve, he sat still, and mustered up courage for a reply.

‘And pray, sir prince, what would you do with her if you had her in your power to-night?’

‘Something very different from what I would do with you, my lord. But please describe her to me, for my very heart is yearning to behold her – describe every point of her form, and lineament of her features.’

‘She is esteemed as very beautiful; for my part I think her but so so,’ said Tudor: ‘She has fair hair, light full blue eyes, and ruddy cheeks; and her brow, I believe, is as fine and as white as any brow can be.’

‘O frightful! what a description! what an ugly minx it must be! Fair hair! red, I suppose, or dirty dull yellow! Light blue eyes! mostly white I fancy? Ah, what a frightful immodest ape it must be! I could spit upon the huzzy!’

‘Mary shield us!’ exclaimed young Tudor, moving farther away from the prince, and striking lightly with his hand on his doublet as if something unclean had been squirted on it. ‘Mary shield us! What does the saucy Scot mean?’

Every one of the troopers put his hand to his sword, and watched the eye of his master. The prince beckoned to the Scots to be quiet; but Lord Tudor did no such thing, for he was flustered and wroth.

‘Pardon me, my lord,’ said the prince, ‘I may perhaps suffer enough from the beauty and perfections of your fair cousin after I see her; you may surely allow me to deride them now. I am trying to depreciate the charms I dread. But I do not like the description of her. Tell me seriously do you not think her very intolerable?’

‘I tell you, prince, I think quite otherwise. I believe Jane to be fifty times more lovely than any dame in Scotland; and a hundred times more beautiful than your tawny virago of a sister, whom I shall rejoice to tame like a

spaniel. The haughty, vain, conceited, swart venom, that she should lay her commands on the Douglas to conquer or die for her! A fine presumption, forsooth! But the world shall see whether the charms of my cousin, Lady Jane Howard, or those of your grim and tawdry princess, have most power.'

'Yes, they shall, my lord,' said the prince: 'In the mean time let us drop the subject. I see I have given you offence, not knowing that you were in love with Lady Jane, which now I clearly see to be the case. Nevertheless, go on with the description, for I am anxious to hear all about her, and I promise to approve if there be a bare possibility of it.'

'Her manner is engaging, and her deportment graceful and easy; her waist is slim, and her limbs slender and elegant beyond any thing you ever saw,' said Lord Tudor.

'O shocking!' exclaimed the prince, quite forgetting himself; 'Worst of all! I declare I have no patience with the creature. After such a description, who can doubt the truth of the reports about the extreme levity of her conduct? Confess now, my lord, that she is very free of her favours, and that the reason why so many young gentlemen visit her is now pretty obvious.'

High offence was now manifest in Lord Jasper Tudor's look. He rose from his seat, and said in great indignation, 'I did not ween I should be insulted in this guise by the meanest peasant in Scotland, far less by one of its courtiers, and least of all by a prince of the blood royal. Yeomen, I will not, I cannot suffer this degradation. These ruffian Scots are intruders on us – here I desire that you will expel them the house.'

The Prince of Scotland was at the head of the table, Tudor was at his right hand; the rest of the English were all on that side, the Scots on the other – their numbers were equal. Dan and his three brethren sat at the bottom of the board around the old man, who had been plying at the beef with no ordinary degree of perseverance, nor did he cease when the fray began. Every one of the two adverse parties was instantly on his feet, with his sword gleaming in his hand; but finding that the benches from which they had arisen hampered them, they with one accord sprung on the tops of these, and crossed their swords. The pages screamed like women. The two noble adventurers seemed scarcely to know the use of their weapons, but looked on with astonishment. At length the prince, somewhat collecting himself, drew out his shabby whanger, and brandished it in a most unwarlike guise, on which the blue-eyed Tudor retreated behind his

attendants, holding up his hands, but still apparently intent on revenge for the vile obloquy thrown on the character of *his cousin*, Lady Jane Howard. ‘’Tis just pe te shance she vantit,’ said the Scot next to the prince.

‘My certy, man, we’ll get a paick at the louns now,’ said the second.

‘Fat te teel’s ta’en ’e bits o’ vee laddies to flee a’ eet abeet ’er buts o’ wheers? I wudnae hae my feet i’ their sheen for three plucks an a beedle,’ said the third.

‘Thou’s a’ i’ the wrang buox now, chaps,’ said the fourth. These were all said with one breath; and before the English-men had time to reply, clash went the swords across the table, and the third Scot, the true Aberdonian, was wounded, as were also two of the Englishmen, at the very first pass.

These matters are much sooner done than described. All this was the work of a few seconds, and done before advice could either be given or attended to. Dan now interfered with all the spirit and authority that he was master of. He came dashing along the middle of the board in his great war boots, striking up their swords as he came, and interposing his boardly frame between the combatants. ‘D—n ye a’ for a wheen madcaps!’ cried Dan as loud as he could bawl: ‘What the muckle deil’s fa’en a bobbing at your midriffs now? Ye’re a’ my father’s guests an’ mine; an’, by the shin-banes o’ Sant Peter, the first side that lifts a sword, or says a misbehadden word, my three brethren and I will tak’ the tother side, an’ smoor the transgressors like as mony moor-poots.’

‘Keep your feet aff the meat, fool,’ said old Pate.

‘Gude sauff us!’ continued Dan, ‘What has been said to gie ony offence? What though the young gentlewoman dis tak a stown jink o’ a’ chap that’s her ain sweetheart whiles? Where’s the harm in that? There’s little doubt o’ the thing. An’ for my part, gin she didna—’

Here Dan was interrupted in his elegant harangue by a wrathful hysteric scream from young Tudor, who pulled out his whinyard, and ran at Dan, boring at him in awkward but most angry sort, crying all the while, ‘I will not bear this insult! Will my followers hear me traduced to my face?’

‘Deil’s i’ e’ wee but steepid laddie,’ said Buchan the Aberdonian; ‘it thinks ’at ’er preeving it to be a wheer ’e sel o’t!’

Dan lifted up his heavy sword in high choler to cleave the stripling, and he would have cloven him to the belt, but curbing his wrath, he only struck his sword, which he made fly into pieces and jingle against the rafters of the

house; then seizing the young adventurer by the shoulder, he snatched him up to him on the board, where he still stood, and, taking his head below his arm, he held him fast with the one hand, making signs with the other to his brethren to join the Scots, and disarm the English, who were the aggressors both times. In the meantime, he was saying to Tudor, 'Hout, hout, young master, ye hae never been o'er the Border afore; ye sude hae stayed at hame, an' wantit a wife till ye gathered mair rummelgumption.'

The five English squires, now seeing themselves set upon by nine, yielded, and suffered themselves to be disarmed.

When Tudor came to himself, he appeared to be exceedingly grieved at his imprudence, and ready to make any acknowledgement, while the prince treated him with still more and more attention; yet these attentions were ever and anon mixed with a teazing curiosity, and a great many inquiries, that the young nobleman could not bear, and did not chuse to answer.

It now became necessary to make some arrangement for the parties passing the night. Patrick Chisholm's house had but one fire-place in an apartment which served for kitchen and hall; but it had a kind of *ben end*, as it was then, and is always to this day, denominated in that part of the country. There was scarcely room to move a foot in it; for, besides two oaken beds with rowan-tree bars, it contained five huge chests belonging to the father and his sons, that held their clothes and warlike accoutrements. The daughters of yeomen in these days did not sit at table with the men. They were the household servants. Two of Pate's daughters, who had been bustling about all the evening, conducted the two noble youths into this apartment, together with their two pages. The one bed was neatly made down with clean clothes, and the other in a more common way. 'Now,' said one of the landward lasses, 'You twa masters are to sleep thegither in here – in o' this gude bed, ye see, an' the twa lads in o' this ane.' The two young noblemen were standing close together, as behoved in such a room. On the girl addressing them thus, their eyes met each other's, but were as instantly withdrawn and fixed in the floor, while a blush of the deepest tint suffused the cheeks of both, spreading over the chin and neck of each. The pages contemplated each other in the same way, but not with the same degree of timidity. The English stripling seemed rather to approve of the arrangement, or at least pretended to do so; for he frankly took the other by the hand, and said in a sweet voice, but broad dialect, 'Weall, yuong Scuot, daghest thou

lig woth mey?' The young Caledonian withdrew his hand, and held down his head: 'I always lie at my master's feet,' said he.

'And so shall you do to-night, Colin,' said the prince, 'for I will share this bed with you, and let my lord take the good one.' 'I cannot go to bed to-night,' said Tudor, 'I will rest me on this chest; I am resolved I sha'n't go to bed, nor throw off my clothes to-night.'

'Ye winna?' said May Chisholm, who visibly wanted a romp with the young blooming chief – 'Ye winna gang til nae bed, will ye nae, and me has been at sic pains making it up til ye? Bess, come here an' help me, we sal soon see whether he's gang til his bed or no, an' that no wi' his braw claes on neither.' So saying, the two frolicsome queans seized the rosy stripling, and in a moment had him stretched on the bed, and, making his doublet fly open all at one rude pull, they were proceeding to undress him, giggling and laughing all the while. Prince Alexander, from a momentary congenial feeling of delicacy, put his hand hastily across to keep the lapels of Tudor's vesture together, without the motion having been perceived by any one in the hurry, and that moment the page flung himself across his master's breast, and reproved the lasses so sharply that they desisted, and left them to settle the matter as they chose.

The prince had, however, made a discovery that astonished him exceeding; for a few minutes his head was almost turned – but the truth soon began to dawn on his mind, and every reflection, every coincidence, every word that had been said, and offence that had been taken, tended to confirm it: so he determined, not for farther trial, but for the joke's sake, to press matters a little further.

When quietness was again restored, and when the blush and the frown had several times taken alternate sway of the young lord's face, the prince said to him. 'After all, my lord, I believe we must take share of the same bed together for this one night. It is more proper and becoming than to sleep with our pages. Besides, I see the bed is good and clean, and I have many things to talk to you about our two countries, and about our two intended brides, or sweethearts let us call them in the meantime.'

'Oh no, no, prince,' said Tudor, 'indeed I cannot, I may not, I would not sleep in the same bed with another gentleman – No – I never did – never.'

'Do not say so, my dear lord, for, on my word, I am going to insist on it,' said the prince, coming close up to him, his eyes beaming with joy at the

discovery he had made. ‘You shall sleep by my side tonight: nay, I will even take you in my bosom and caress you as if you were my own sweet dear Lady Jane Howard.’ Tudor was now totally confounded, and knew neither what to say for himself, nor what he did say when he spoke. He held out both his hands, and cried, ‘Do not, prince, do not – I beg – I implore do not; for I cannot, cannot consent. I never slept even in the same apartment with a man in all my life.’

‘What, have you always slept in a room by yourself?’ asked the teazing prince.

‘No, never, but always with ladies – yes, always!’ was the passionate and sincere reply.

Here the prince held up his hands, and turned up his eyes. ‘What a young profligate!’ exclaimed he, ‘Mary shield us! Have you no conscience with regard to the fair sex that you have begun so wicked a course, and that so early? Little did I know why you took a joke on your cousin so heinously amiss! I see it now, truth will out! Ah, you are such a youth! I will not go a foot further to see Lady Jane. What a wicked degraded imp she must be! Do not kindle into a passion again, my dear lord. I can well excuse your feigned wrath, it is highly honourable. I hate the knight that blabs the favours he enjoys from the fair. He is bound to defend the honour that has stooped to him; even though (as in the present instance I suppose) it have stooped to half a dozen more besides.’

A great deal of taunting and ill humour prevailed between these capricious and inexperienced striplings, and sorely was Tudor pressed to take share of a bed with the prince, but in vain – his feelings recoiled from it; and the other, being in possession of a secret of which the English lord was not aware, took that advantage of teazing and tormenting him almost beyond sufferance. After all, it was decided that each should sleep with his own page; a decision that did not seem to go well down at all with the Yorkshire boy, who once ventured to expostulate with his lord, but was silenced with a look of angry disdain.

CHAPTER 5

He set her on his milk-white steed,
  Himself lap on behind her,
And they are o'er the Highland hills;
  Her friends they cannot find her.

As they rode over hill and dale
  This lady often fainted,
And cried, 'Wo to my cursed moneye,
  That this road to me invented.'

Ballad of Rob Roy

O cam ye here to fight, young man,
  Or cam ye here to flee?
Or cam ye out o' the wally west
  Our bonnie bride to see?

Balled called Foul Play

It is by this time needless to inform my readers, that these two young adventurers were no other than the rival beauties of the two nations, for whose charms all this bloody coil was carried on at Roxburgh; and who, without seeing, had hated each other as cordially as any woman is capable of hating her rival in beauty or favour. So much had the siege and the perils of Roxburgh become the subject of conversation, that the ears of the two maidens had long listened to nothing else, and each of them deemed her honour embarked in the success of her lover. Each of them had set out with the intent of visiting the camp in disguise; and having enough of interest to secure protections for feigned names, each determined to see her rival in the first place, the journey not being far; and neither of them it is supposed went with any kind intent. Each of them had a maid dressed in boy's clothes with her, and five stout troopers, all of whom were utterly ignorant of the secret. The princess had by chance found out her rival's sex; but the Scottish lady and her attendant being both taller and of darker complexions

than the other two, no suspicions were entertained against them detrimental to their enterprise. The princess never closed an eye, but lay meditating on the course she should take. She was convinced that she had her rival in her power, and she determined, not over generously, to take advantage of her good fortune. The time drew nigh that Roxburgh must be lost or won, and well she knew that, whichever side succeeded, according to the romantic ideas of that age, the charms of the lady would have all the honour, while she whose hero lost would be degraded – considerations which no woman laying claim to superior and all-powerful charms could withstand.

Next morning Dan was aroused at an early hour by his supposed prince, who said to him, 'Brave yeoman, from a long conversation that I have had last night with these English strangers, I am convinced that they are despatched on some traitorous mission; and as the warden is in Northumberland, I propose conveying them straight to Douglas' camp, there to be tried for their lives. If you will engage to take charge of them, and deliver them safely to the captain before night, you shall have a high reward; but if you fail, and suffer any of them to escape, your neck shall answer for it. How many men can you raise for this service?'

'Our men are maistly up already,' said Dan; 'but muckle Charlie o' Yardbire gaed hame last night wi' twa or three kye, like oursels. Gin Charlie an' his lads come, I sal answer for the English chaps, if they war twa to ane. I hae mysel an' my three billies, deil a shank mae; but an Charlie come he's as gude as some three, an' his backman's nae bean-swaup neither.'

'Then,' said the counterfeit prince, 'I shall leave all my attendants to assist you save my page – we two must pursue our journey with all expedition. All that is required of you is to deliver the prisoners safe to the Douglas. I will despatch a message to him by the way, apprising him of the circumstances.'

The Lady Margaret and her page then mounted their palfreys and rode off without delay; but, instead of taking the road by Gorranberry, as they had proposed over night, they scoured away at a light gallop down the side of the Teviot. At the town of Hawick she caused her page, who was her chief waiting-maid and confidant, likewise in boy's clothes, to cut out her beautiful fleece of black hair, that glittered like the wing of the raven, being determined to attend in disguise the issue of the contest. She then procured a red curled wig, and dressing herself in a Highland garb, with a plumed

bonnet, tartan jacket and trowsers, and Highland hose and brogues, her appearance was so completely altered, that even no one who had seen her the day before, in the character of the prince her brother, could possibly have known her to be the same person; and leaving her page near the camp to await her private orders, she rode straight up to head-quarters by herself.

Being examined as she passed the outposts, she said she brought a message to Douglas of the greatest importance, and that it was from the court; and her address being of such a superior cast, every one furthered her progress till she came to the captain's tent. Scarcely did she know him – care, anxiety, and watching had so worn him down; and her heart was melted when she saw his appearance. Never, perhaps, could she have been said to have loved him till that moment; but seeing what he had suffered for her sake, the great stake he had ventured, and the almost hopeless uncertainty that appeared in every line of his face, raised in her heart a feeling unknown to her before; and highly did that heart exult at the signal advantage that her good fortune had given him over his rival. Yet she determined on trying the state of his affections and hopes. Before leaving Hawick, she had written a letter to him, inclosing a lock of her hair neatly plaited; but this letter she kept back in order to sound her lover first without its influence. He asked her name and her business. She had much business, she said, but not a word save for his private ear. Douglas was struck with the youth's courtly manner, and looked at him with a dark searching eye – 'I have no secrets,' said he, 'with these my kinsmen: I desire, before them, to know your name and business.'

'My name,' said the princess pertly, 'is Colin Roy M'Alpin – I care not who knows my name; but no word further of my message do I disclose save to yourself.'

'I must humour this pert stripling,' said he, turning to his friends; 'if his errand turns out to be one of a trivial nature, and that does not require all this ceremony, I shall have him horse-whipped.'

With that the rest of the gentlemen went away, and left the two by themselves. Colin, as we must now, for brevity's sake, term the princess, was at first somewhat abashed before the dark eye of Douglas, but soon displayed all the effrontery that his assumed character warranted, if not three times more.

‘Well, now, my saucy little master, Colin Roy M’Alpin, please condescend so far as to tell me whence you are, and what is your business here – this secret business, of such vast importance.’

‘I am from court, my lor’; from the Scottish court, an’t please you, my lor’; but not directly as a body may say – my lor’; not directly – here – there – south – west – precipitately, incontrovertibly, ascertaining the scope and bearing of the progressive advance of the discomfiture and gradual wreck of your most flagrant and preposterous undertaking.’

‘The devil confound the impertinent puppy!’

‘Hold, hold, my lor’, I mean your presumptuous and foolhardy enterprise, first in presuming to the hand of my mistress, the king’s daughter – my lovely and queenly mistress; and then in foolhardily running your head against the walls of Roxburgh to attain this, and your wit and manhood against the superior generalship of a Musgrave.’

‘By the pock-net of St Peter, I will cause every bone in your body to be basted to powder, you incorrigible pedant and puppy!’ said the Douglas; and seizing him by the collar of the coat, he was about to drag him to the tent-door and throw him into the air.

‘Hold, my lor’; please keep off your rough uncourtly hands till I deliver the credentials of my mistress.’

‘Did you say that you were page to the Princess Margaret? Yes, surely you are, I have erst seen that face, and heard that same flippant tongue. Pray, what word or token does my dear and sovereign lady send me?’

‘She bade me say, that she does not approve of you at all, my lor’: – that, for her sake, you ought to have taken this castle many days ago. And she bade me ask you why you don’t enter the castle by the gate, or over the wall, or under the hill, which is only a sand one, and hang up all the Englishmen by the necks, and send the head of Philip Musgrave to his saucy dame? – She bade me ask you why you don’t, my lor’?’

‘Women will always be women,’ said Douglas surlily to himself: ‘I thought the princess superior to her sex, but—’

‘But! but what, my lor’? Has she not good occasion for displeasure? She bade me tell you that you don’t like her; – that you don’t like her half so well as Musgrave does his mistress – else why don’t you do as much for her? He took the castle for the sake of his mistress, and for her sake he keeps it in spite of you. Therefore she bade me tell you, that you must *go in*

and beat the English, and take the castle from them; for she will not suffer it that Lady Jane Howard shall triumph over her.'

'Tell her in return,' said Douglas, 'that I will do what man can do; and when that is done, she shall find that I neither will be slack in requiring the fulfilment of her engagement, nor in performing my own. If that womanish tattling be all that you have to say – begone: the rank of your employer protects you.'

'Hold, my lor', she bade me look well, and tell her what you were like, and if I thought you changed since I waited on you at court. On my conscience you look very ill. These are hard ungainly features of yours. I'll tell her you look very shabby, and very surly, and that you have lost all heart. But oh, my lor', I forgot she bade me tell you, that if you found you were clearly beat, it would be as well to draw off your men and abandon the siege; and that she would, perhaps, in pity, give you a moiety of your lands again.'

'I have no patience with the impertinence of a puppy, even though the messenger of her I love and esteem above all the world. Get you hence.'

'Oh, my lor', I have not third done yet. But, stay, here is a letter I had almost forgot.'

Douglas opened the letter. Well he knew the hand; there were but few in Scotland who could write, and none could write like the princess. It contained a gold ring set with rubies, and a lock of her hair. He kissed them both; and tried the ring first on the one little finger, and then on the other, but it would scarcely go over the nail; so he kissed them again, and put them in his bosom. He then read to himself as follows:

> 'MY GOOD LORD – I enclose you two love-tokens of my troth; let them be as beacons to your heart to guide it to deeds of glory and renown. For my sake put down these English. Margaret shall ever pray for your success. Retain my page Colin near your person. He is true-hearted, and his flippancy affected. Whatever you communicate to him will be safely transmitted to
>
> 'MARGARET.'

It may well be supposed how Colin watched the emotions of Douglas while reading this heroic epistle; and, in the true spirit of the age, they were abundantly extravagant. He kissed the letter, hugged it in his bosom, and vowed to six or seven saints to do such deeds for his adored and divine princess as never were heard or read of.

‘Now, my good lor,’ said the page, ‘you must inform me punctually what hopes you have of success, and if there is any thing wanting that the kingdom can afford you.’

‘My ranks are too thin,’ replied the Douglas; ‘and I have engaged to take it with my own vassals. The warden is too proud to join his forces to mine on that footing, but keeps scouring the borders, on pretence of preventing supplies, and thus assisting me, but in truth for enriching himself and his followers. If I could have induced him and his whole force to have joined the camp, famine would have compelled the enemy to yield a month agone. But I have now the captain’s brother prisoner; and I have already given him to know, that if he does not deliver up the castle to me in four days, I will hang the young knight up before his eyes – I have sworn to do it, and I swear again to keep my oath.’

‘I will convey all this to my mistress,’ said Colin. ‘So then you have his only brother in your hold? My lor’, the victory is your own, and the princess, my mistress, beside. In a few hours will be placed in your hands the primal cause and fomentor of this cruel and bloody war, the Lady Jane Howard.’

The Douglas started like one aroused from slumber, or a state of lethargy, by a sudden wound. ‘What did you say, boy?’ said he. ‘Either I heard amiss, or you are dreaming. I have offered estates, nay, I have offered an earldom, to any hardy adventurer who would bring me that imperious dame; but the project has been abandoned as quite impracticable.’

‘Rest content,’ said Colin: ‘I have secured her, and she will be delivered into your hands before night. She has safe passports with her to the Scottish court, but they are in favour of Jasper Tudor, son to the Earl of Pembroke; so that the discovery of her sex proves her an impostor, and subjects her to martial law, which I request, for my mistress’ sake, you will execute on her. My lady the princess, with all her beauty, and high accomplishments, is a very woman; and I know there is nothing on earth she so much dreads as the triumph of Lady Jane over her. Besides, it is evident she was bound to the Scottish court either to poison the princess, or inveigle her into the hands of her enemies. All her attendants are ignorant of her sex, save her page, who is said to be a blooming English country maiden. The Prince Alexander bade me charge you never to mention by what means she came

into your hands, but to give it out that she was brought to you by a miracle, by witchcraft, or by the power of a mighty magician.'

'It is well thought of, boy,' said the Douglas, greatly elevated – 'I have been obliged to have recourse to such means already – this will confirm all. The princess your mistress desired that you should remain with me. You shall be my right hand page, I will love and favour you; you shall be fed with the bread and wine, and shall sleep in my tent, and I will trust you with all my secrets for the welcome tidings you have brought, and for the sake of the angelic dame that recommends you to me; for she is my beloved, my adored mistress, and for her will I either conquer or die! My sword is her's – my life is her's – Nay, my very soul is the right of my beloved!' Poor Colin dropped a tear on hearing this passionate nonsense. Women love extravagance in such matters, but in those days it had no bounds.

It was not long till the prisoners arrived, under the care of muckle Charlie Scott of Yardbire and Dan Chisholm, with their troopers, guarded in a very original manner. When Charlie arrived at old Chisholm's house and learned that a *prince* had been there, and had given such charges about the prisoners, he determined to make sure work; and as he had always most trust to put in himself, he took the charge of the young English nobleman and his squire, as he supposed them to be. The page he took on his huge black horse behind him, lashing him to his body with strong belts cut from a cow's raw hide. His ancles were moreover fastened to the straps at the tops of Charlie's great war boots; so that the English maiden must have had a very uncomfortable ride. But the other he held on before him, keeping her all the way in his arms, exactly as a countryman holds up a child in the church to be christened.

The Lady Jane Howard had plenty of the spirit of romance about her, but she neither had the frame nor the energy of mind requisite for carrying her wild dreams of female heroism into effect. She was an only child – a spoiled one; having been bred up without perhaps ever being controlled, till she fell into the hands of these border mosstroopers. Her displeasure was excessive –. She complained bitterly of her detainment, and much more of being sent a prisoner to the camp. When she found herself in muckle Charlie Scott's arms, borne away to be given up to the man whom of all the world she had most reason to dread, she even forgot herself so far as to burst into tears. Charlie, with all his inordinate strength and prowess, had a

heart so soft, that, as he said himself, ‘a laverock might hae laired in’t;’ and he farther added, that when he saw ‘the bit bonny English callan’, that was comed o’ sic grand blude, grow sae desperately wae, an’ fa’ a blirting and greeting, the deil a bit but his heart was like to come out at his mouth.’ This was no lie, for his comrades beheld him two or three times come across his eyes with his mailed sleeve – a right uncouth handkerchief; and then he tried to comfort the youth with the following speech: ‘Troth, man, but I’m unco wae for ye, ye’re sae young an’ sae bonny, an’ no’ a fit man at a’ to send out i’ thir crabbit times. But tak good heart, an’ dinna be dauntit, for it will soon be over w’ye. Ye’ll neither hae muckle to thole nor lang time to dree’t, for our captain will hang ye directly. He hangs a’ spies an’ messengers aff hand; sae it’s no worth naebody’s while to greet. Short wark’s aye best i’ sic cases.’

‘He cannot, he dares not injure a hair of my head,’ said Lady Jane passionately.

‘*Canna!*’ said Charlie, ‘Gude faith, ye ken that’s nonsense. He can as easily hang ye, or do ought else w’ye, as I can wipe my beard. An’ as for the thing that the Douglas *darena* do, gude faith, ye ken, I never saw it yet. But I’m sure I wish ye *may* be safe, for it wad do little good to me to see your bit pease-weep neck rackit.’

‘It was most unfair, as well as most ungenerous in your prince to detain me,’ said she, ‘as my business required urgency. I had regular signed warrandice, and went on the kindest intent; besides, I have a great aversion to be put into the hands of Douglas. How many cows and ewes would you take to set me at liberty?’

‘Whisht, whisht, Sir!’ said Charlie; ‘Gudesake haud your tongue! That’s kittle ground. Never speak o’ sic a thing. But how many could ye afford to gie, and I *were* to set you at liberty?’

‘In the first place, I will give you five hundred head of good English nolt,’ said Lady Jane.

‘Eh? What?’ said Charlie, holding his horse still, and turning his ear close round to the lady’s face, that he might hear with perfect distinctness the extraordinary proffer. It was repeated. Charlie was almost electrified with astonishment. ‘Five hunder head o’ nout!’ exclaimed he: ‘But d’ye mean their heads by theirsels? – cuttit aff, like?’

‘No, no; five hundred good live cattle.’

‘Mercy on us! Gude faith, they wad stock a’ Yardbire – an’ Raeburn,’ added he, after a pause, putting his horse again slowly in motion; ‘an’ Watkerrick into the bargain,’ added he, with a full drawn sigh, putting the spurs to his beast, that he might go quicker to carry him away from the danger. ‘For troth, d’ye ken, my lord, we’re no that scarce o’ grund in Scotland; we can get plenty o’ that for little thing, gin we could get ought to lay on’t. But it’s hard to get beasts, an’ kittle to keep them i’ our country. Five hunder head o’ black cattle! Hech! an Charlie Scott had a’ thae, how mony braw lads could he tak at his back o’er Craikcorse to join his master the warden! But come, come, it canna be. War somebody a Scots lord, as he’s an English ane, an i’ the same danger, I wad risk muckle to set him free. But come, Corby, my fine naig, ye hae carried me into mony a scrape, ye maun carry me out o’ this ane, or, gude faith, your master’s gane. Ha, lad, ye never had sic a backfu’ i’ your life! Ye hae five hunder head o’ black cattle on’t, ye dog, an’ ye’re carrying them a’ away frae your master an’ Yardbire wi’ as little ceremony as he took you frae Squire Weir o’ Cockermouth. Ah, Corby, ye’re gayan like your master, ye hae a lang free kind o’ conscience, ye tike!’

‘But, my dear Sir,’ said Lady Jane, ‘you have not heard the half of my proffer. You seem to be a generous, sensible, and good natured gentleman.’

‘Do I?’ said Charlie, ‘Thanks t’ye, my lord.’

‘Now,’ continued she, ‘if you will either set me and my page safely down on English ground, or within the ports of Edinborough, I’ll add five thousand sheep to the proffer I have already made you.’

‘Are ye no joking?’ said Charlie, again stopping his horse.

‘On my honour I am not,’ was the answer.

‘They’ll stock a’ Blake-Esk-head an’ the Garald-Grains,’ said Charlie: ‘Hae ye a free passport to the Scottish court?’

‘Yes, I have, and signed with the warden’s name.’

‘Na, na, haud your tongue there; my master has nae name,’ said Charlie: ‘He has a good speaking name, an’ ane he disna think shame o’, but nae name for black an’ white.’

‘I’ll show you it,’ said Lady Jane.

‘Na, ye needna fash,’ said Charlie; ‘I fear it wad be unmannerly in me to doubt a lord’s word.’

‘How soon could you carry us to Edinborough?’ inquired Lady Jane, anxious to keep muckle Charlie in the humour of taking her any where save into the hands of Douglas.

‘That’s rather a question to speer at Corby than me,’ said Charlie; ‘but I think if we miss drowning i’ Tweed, an’ breaking our necks o’er the Red-brae, an’ sinking out o’ sight i’ Soutra-flow, that I could tak in hand to hae ye in Edinborough afore twal o’clock at night –. Bad things for you, Corby.’

‘Never say another word about it then,’ said Lady Jane; ‘the rest are quite gone before us, and out of sight. Turn to the left, and ride for Edinborough. Think of the five hundred cows and five thousand sheep.’

‘Oh, that last beats a’!’ said Charlie. ‘Five thousand sheep! how mony is that? Five score’s a hunder – I’m sure o’ that. Every hunder’s five score; then – and how mony hunder maks a thousand –?’

‘Ten,’ said the page, who was forced to laugh at Charlie’s arithmetic.

‘Ten?’ repeated Charlie. ‘Then ten times five hunder that maks but ae thousand; an’ other ten times five hunder – D—n me if I ken how mony is o’ them ava. What does it signify for a man to hae mair gear than he can count? I fancy we had better jogg on the gate we’re gaun, Corby.’

‘I am sure, friend, ye never had such a chance of being rich,’ said Lady Jane, ‘and may never, in all likelihood, have such a chance again.’

‘That is a’ true ye’re saying, my lord, an’ a sair heart it has gi’en me,’ said Charlie; ‘but your offer’s ower muckle, an’ that maks me dread there’s something at the bottom o’t that I dinna comprehend. Gude faith, an the warden war to suffer danger or disgrace for my greed o’ siller, it wad be a bonny story! Corby, straight on, ye dog: ding the brains out o’ the gutters, clear for the camp, ye hellicat of an English hound. What are ye snoring an’ cocking your lugs at? Od an ye get company like yoursel, ye carena what mischief ye carry your master into. Get on, I say, an’ dinna gie me time to hear another word or think about this business again.’

The young lady began here to lose heart, seeing that Charlie had plucked up a determination. But her companion attacked him in her turn with all the flattery and fair promises she could think of, till Charlie found his heart again beginning to waver and calculate; so that he had no other shift but to croon a border war-song, that he might not hear this dangerous conversation. Still the page persevered, till Charlie, losing all patience, cried out as loud and as bitterly as he could, ‘Haud your tongue, ye slee-

gabbit limb o' the auld ane. D—n ye, d'ye think a man's conscience is to be hadden abreed like the mou' of a sack, an' crammed fu' o' beef an' mutton whether he will or no? Corby, another nicker an' another snore, lad, an' we'll soon see you aff at the gallop.'

Thus ended the trying colloquy between muckle Charlie Scott o' Yardbire and his two prisoners; the rest of his conversation was to Corby, whom he forthwith pushed on by spur and flattery to the camp.

When the truth came to be discovered, many puzzled themselves endeavouring to guess what Charlie would actually have done had he known by the way what a treasure he had in his arms – the greatest beauty, and the greatest heiress in England; – for Charlie was as notable for kindness and generosity as he was for bodily strength; and, besides, he was poor, as he frankly acknowledged; but then he only wished for riches to be able to keep more men for the service of his chief. Some thought he would have turned his horse round without further ceremony, and carried her straight to Yardbire, on purpose to keep her there for a wife; others thought he would have risked his neck, honour, and every thing, and restored her again to her friends. But it was impossible for any of them to guess what he would have done, as it was proved afterwards that Charlie could not guess himself. When the truth came to be divulged, and was first told to him, his mouth, besides becoming amazingly extended in its dimensions, actually grew four-square with astonishment; and when asked what he would have done had he known, he smacked his lips, and wiped them with the back of his hand as if his teeth had been watering – and, laughing to himself with a chuckling sound, like a moor-cock, he turned about his back to conceal his looks, and only answered with these emphatic words: 'Gude faith, it was as well I didna ken.'

CHAPTER 6

Some write of preclair conquerouris,
And some of vallyeant emperouris,
And some of nobill mychtie kingis,
That royally did reull the ringis;
And some of squyris douchty deidis,
That wonderis wrocht in weirly weidis;
Sa I intand the best I can
Descryve the deidis and the man.

Sir Dav. Lindsaye

Wald God I war now in Pitcary!
Becass I haif bene se ill deidy.
Adew! I dar na langer tairy,
I dried I waif intill ane widdy.

Ibid

In the same grotesque guise as formerly described, Charlie at length came with his two prisoners to the outposts of the Scottish army. The rest of the train had passed by before him, and warned their friends who was coming, and in what stile; for no one thought it worth his while to tarry with Charlie and his overloaden horse. When he came near the soldiers they hurra'd, and waved their bonnets, and gathering about Charlie in crowds, they would not let him onward. Besides, some fell a loosing the prisoner behind him, and others holding up their arms to release him of the one he carried before; and, seeing how impatient he was, and how determined to keep his hold, they grew still more importunate in frolic. But it had nearly cost some of them dear; for Charlie, growing wroth, squeezed the Lady Jane so strait with the left arm, that she was forced to cry out; and putting his right over his shoulder, he drew out his tremendous two-hand sword. 'Now stand back, devils,' cried Charlie, 'or, gude faith, I'll gar Corby ride ower the taps o' the best o' ye. I hae had ower sair a trial for heart o' flesh already; but when I stood that, it sanna be the arm o' flesh that takes them frae me now,

till I gie them into the Douglas's ain hands. Stand back, ye devils; a Scott never gies up his trust as lang as his arm can dimple at the elbow.'

The soldiers flew away from around him like a flight of geese, and with the same kind of noise too – every one being giggling and laughing – and up rode Charlie to the door of the Douglas' pavilion, where he shouted aloud for the captain. Douglas, impatient to see his illustrious prisoner, left the others abruptly, and hasted out at Charlie's call.

'Gude faith, my lord,' said Charlie, 'I beg your pardon for garring you come running out that gate; but here's a bit English lord for ye, an' his henchman – sic master, sic man, as the saying is. There war terrible charges gi'en about them, sae I thought I wad secure them, an' gie them into your ain hands.'

'I am much beholden to you, gallant Yardbire,' said Douglas: 'The care and pains you have taken shall not be forgotten.'

This encouraging Charlie, he spoke to the earl with great freedom, who was mightily diverted with his manner, as well as with his mode of securing the prisoners.

'There's his lordship for ye,' said Charlie, holding him out like a small bale of goods: 'Mind ye hae gotten him safe off my hand; an' here's another chap I hae fastened to my back. An a' the English nobles war like thir twa, I hae been thinking, my lord, that they might tak' our lasses frae us, but we wadna be ill pinched to tak their kye frae them; an' it wad be nae hard bargain for us neither.' So saying, he cut his belts and thongs of raw hide, and let the attendant lady, in page's clothes, free of his body. 'He's a little, fine, soft, cozey callan this,' added Charlie, 'he has made my hinderlands as warm as they had been in an oon.'

Douglas took Lady Jane off from before the gallant yeoman in his arms. He observed with what a look she regarded him; and he was sure, from the first view he got of her features, that the page Colin must have been right with regard to the sex of the prisoner. He likewise noted the holes in her ears, from which it was apparent that pendant jewels had lately been taken; and he hoped the other part of the page's information might likewise be correct, though how to account for such an extraordinary piece of good fortune he was wholly at a loss. He led her into the inner pavilion, and there, in presence of his secretary and two of his kinsmen, examined her papers and passports. They were found all correct, and signed by the public

functionaries of both nations, in favour of Jasper Tudor, son to the Earl of Pembroke.

‘These are quite sufficient, my young lord,’ said Douglas; ‘I see no cause for detaining you further. You shall have a sufficient guard till you are out of the range of my army, and safe furtherance to the Scottish court.’

The prisoner’s countenance lighted up, and she thanked Douglas in the most grateful terms, blessing herself that she had fallen into the hands of so courteous a knight, and urged the necessity of their sudden departure. Douglas assured her they should be detained no longer than the necessity of the times required; but that it was absolutely requisite, for his own safety, the safety of the realm, and the success of the enterprise in which he was engaged, and so deeply concerned, that they should submit to a personal search from head to foot, lest some traitorous correspondence might be secretly conveyed by them.

The countenance of the prisoner again altered at this information. It became at first pale as a lily, and immediately after blushed as deeply as the damask rose, while the tears started to her eyes. It was no wonder, considering the predicament in which she now stood; her delicate lady form to be searched by the hands of rude warriors, her sex discovered, and her mission to the Scottish court found out to be a wild intrigue. She fell instantly on her knees before Douglas, and besought him in moving accents to dispense with the useless formality of searching her and her young kinsman and companion, assuring him at the same time that neither of them had a single scrap of writing that he had not seen, and adjuring him on his honour and generosity as a knight to hearken to this request.

‘The thing is impossible, my lord,’ said Douglas; ‘and, moreover, the anxiety you manifest about such a trifle argues a consciousness of guilt. You must submit to be searched on the instant. Chuse of us whom you will to the office.’

‘I will never submit to it,’ she said passionately, ‘there is not a knight in England would have refused such a request to you.’

‘I would never have asked it, my lord,’ said he; ‘and it is your utter inexperience in the customs of war that makes you once think of objecting to it. I am sorry we must use force. Bring in two of the guards.’

‘Hold, hold, my lord,’ said Lady Jane, ‘since I must submit to such a degradation, I will submit to yourself. I will be searched by your own

hands, and yours alone.'

They were already in the inner tent. Douglas desired his friends to go out, which they complied with, and he himself began to search the person of Lady Jane, with the most careful minuteness, as he pretended, well aware what was to be the issue of the search. He examined all her courtly coat, pockets, lining, and sleeves – he came to her gaudy doublet, stiff with gold embroidery, and began to unloose it, but she laid both her hands upon her breast, and looked in his face with eyes so speaking, and so beseeching, that it was impossible for man to mistake the import. Douglas did not mistake it, but was bent upon having proof positive.

'What?' said he, 'do you still resist? What is here you would conceal?'

'Oh my Lord,' said she, 'do you not see?'

'I see nothing,' said he; and while she feebly struggled he loosed the vest, when the fair heaving bosom discovered the sex of his prisoner, and at the same time, with the struggle, the beautiful light locks had escaped from their confinement, and hung over her breast in waving ringlets. The maid stood revealed; and, with the disclosure, all the tender emotions and restrained feelings of the female heart burst forth like a river that has been dammed up from running in its natural channel, and has just got vent anew. She wept and sobbed till her fair breast was like to rend. She even seized on Douglas' hand, and wet it with her tears. He, on his part, feigned great amazement.

'How is this?' said he, 'A maid!'

'Yes indeed, my lord, you see before you, and in your power, a hapless maid of noble blood, who set out on a crazy expedition of love, but, from inexperience, has fallen into your hands.'

'Then the whole pretended mission to our Scottish court is, it appears, a fraud, a deep laid imposition of some most dangerous intent, as the interest that has been used to accomplish it fully demonstrates. You have subjected yourself and all your followers to military execution; and the only method by which you can procure a respite, either for yourself or them, is to make a full confession of the whole plot.'

'Alas, my lord, I have no plot to confess. Mine was merely a romantic expedition of youthful love, and, as you are a knight, and a lover yourself, I beg your clemency, that you will pardon my followers and me. They are innocent; and, save my page, who is likewise a lady, and my own

kinswoman, all the rest are as ignorant who I am, and what I am, as the child that is unborn.'

'If you would entertain any hopes of a reprieve, I say, madam, either for yourself or them, declare here to me instantly your name, lineage, and the whole of your business in Scotland, and by whose powerful interest you got this safe conduct made out, for one who, it seems, knows nothing of it, or who, perhaps, does not exist.'

'Surely you will not be so ungallant as to insist upon a lady exposing herself and all her relations? No, my lord, whatever become of me, you must never attain to the knowledge of my name, rank, or titles. I entrust myself to your mercy: you can have nothing to fear from the machinations of a love-lorn damsel.'

'I am placed in peculiarly hard circumstances, madam; I have enemies abroad and at home, and have nothing but my own energies to rely on to save my house and name from utter oblivion, and my dearest hopes from extinguishment. This expedition of yours, folded as it is in deceit and forgery, has an ominous and daring appearance. The house of Douglas must not fall for the tears of a deceitful maiden, the daughter of my enemy. Without a full disclosure of all that I request, every one of you shall suffer death in the sight of both armies before the going down of the sun. I will begin with the meanest of your followers, in hopes, for the sake of your youth and your sex, that you will relent and make a full disclosure of your name, and all your motives for such an extraordinary adventure.'

Lady Jane continued positive and peremptory, as did also her attendant, who had been thoroughly schooled before-hand, in case of their sex being discovered, never, on any account, to acknowledge who she was, lest it should put Musgrave wholly in Douglas' power. The latter, therefore, to keep up the same system of terror and retribution first practised by his opponent, caused sound the death knell, and hung out the flag of blood, to apprise those within the fortress that some of their friends were shortly to be led to execution.

The first that was brought out was a thick-set swarthy yeoman, who said his name was Edmund Heaton, and that he had been a servant to Belsay, whom he had followed in the border wars. When told that he was about to be hanged for a spy and a traitor, he got very angry, even into such a rage that they could not know what he said, for he had a deep rough burr in his

throat, and spoke a coarse English dialect. ‘Hang’d? I hang’d? and fogh whot? Domn your abswoghdity! Hang ane mon fogh deying whot his meastegh beeds him–?’ He was told that he had not two minutes to live, unless he could discover something of the plot in which his employers were engaged; that it was found he had been accompanying two ladies in disguise, on some traitorous mission which they would not reveal; and it was the law of war that he should suffer for the vile crime in which he was an accomplice.

‘Nobbit, I tell you that won’t dey at all; – n-n-nor it sha’n’t dey neithegh. Do you think you aghe to hang eveghy mon that follows ane woeman? Domn them, I nevegh knew them lead to oughts but eel! If I had known they had been woemen – Domn them!’ – He was hauled up to the scaffold, for he refused to walk a foot. – ‘Wh-wh-why, nobbit speak you now,’ cried he in utter desperation; ‘why n-n-nobbit you aghe not serious, aghe you?’ He was told he should soon find to his experience that they were quite serious –. ‘Why, cworse the whole geneghation of you, the thing is nwot to be bwoghn. I wont swoffegh it – that I woll not. It is dwonright mworder. Oh, ho, ho!’ and he wept, crying as loud as he could, ‘Oh-oh! ho: mworder! mworder! Domn eveghy Scwot of you!’ – In this mood, kicking, crying, and swearing, was he turned off, and hanged in sight of both hosts.

The walls of Roxburgh were crowded with spectators. They could not divine who it was that was suffering; for all kind of communication was forbid by Musgrave, and it was now become exceedingly difficult. Great was their wonder and anxiety when they beheld one trooper after another of their countrymen brought out and hanged like dogs. But it was evident to every beholder, from the unsettled and perturbed motions of those on the wall, that something within the fortress was distressing the besieged. Some hurried to and fro; others stood or moved about in listless languor; and there were a few that gazed without moving, or taking their eyes from the spot where they were fixed. Not one flight of arrows came to disturb the execution, as usual; and it was suspected that their whole stock of arrows was exhausted. This would have been good tidings for the Scots, could they have been sure of it, as they might then have brought their files closer to the walls, and more effectually ensured a strict blockade.

Lady Jane’s followers were all executed, and herself and companion sore threatened in vain. Douglas, however, meant to reserve them for another

purpose than execution – to ensure to himself the surrender of the fortress, namely; but of her squires he was glad to be rid, for fear of a discovery being made to the English that the lady was in his hands, which might have brought the whole puissance of the realm upon him; whereas the generality of the nation viewed the siege merely as an affair of Border chivalry, in which they were little interested, and deemed Musgrave free from any danger.

It was on St Leonard's day that these five Englishmen were executed; and as a retaliation in part, a Scots fisherman was hanged by the English from the wall of the castle; one who indeed had been the mean of doing them a great deal of mischief. And thus stood matters at that period of the siege; namely, the Earl of Douglas and Mar lay before Roxburgh with eight thousand hardy veterans, all his own vassals. The Redhough kept a flying army on the borders of Northumberland, chiefly about the mountains of Cheviot and Cocketdale, interrupting all supplies and communications from that quarter, and doing excellent service to himself and followers, and more to the Douglas than the latter seemed to admit of. Whenever he found the English gathering to any head, he did not go and attack them, but, leaving a flying party of horse to watch their motions, he instantly made a diversion somewhere else, which drew them off with all expedition. A numerous army, hastily raised, entered Scotland on the west border, on purpose to draw off the warden; but they were surprised and defeated by the Laird of Johnson, who raised the Annandale people, and attacked the English by night. He followed them into Cumberland, and fought two sharp battles with them there, in both of which he had the advantage, and he then fell a spoiling the country. This brought the Northumberland and Durham men into these parts, who mustered under Sir William Fetherstone to the amount of fifteen thousand men. Johnston retired, and the Earl of Galloway, to back him, raised twenty thousand in the west, and came towards the Sarke: So that the siege of Roxburgh was viewed but as an item in the general convulsion, though high was the stake for those that played, and ruthless the game while it lasted. Douglas now looked upon the die as turned in his favour, as he held pledges that would render the keeping of it of no avail to his opponent. The lady was in his power at whose fiat Musgrave had taken and defended the perilous castle so bravely – but of this no man knew save the Douglas himself. Sir Richard Musgrave was likewise in his hand, the

captain’s youngest, most beloved, and only surviving brother; and Douglas had threatened, against a certain day, if the keys of the castle were not surrendered to him, to hang the young hero publicly, in the view of both hosts; and in all his threats he had never once broke his word. We must now take a peep within the walls of Roxburgh, and see how matters are going on there.

CHAPTER 7

I cast my net in Largo bay,
  And fishes I caught nine;
There were three to roast, and three to boil,
  And three to bait the line.

Old Song

Saw never man so faynt a levand wycht,
And na ferlye, for ouir excelland lycht
  Corruptis the witt, and garris the blude awail,
  Until the harte, thocht it na dainger aill,
Quhen it is smorit memberis wirk not rychte,
  The dreadfulle terrour swa did him assaile.

Pal. of Hon.

Berwick was then in the hands of the English, and commanded by Sir Thomas Musgrave, the captain of Roxburgh's cousin; so also was Norham, and all the forts between, on that side of the river. Notwithstanding of this, the power of the Scots predominated so much in the open field during that reign, that this chain of forts proved finally of no avail to Lord Musgrave, (or Sir Philip Musgrave, as he is generally denominated,) though he had depended on keeping the communication open, else in victualling Roxburgh he had calculated basely. The garrison were already reduced to the greatest extremes; they were feeding on their horses and on salted hides; and, two or three days previous to this, their only communication with their countrymen had been cut off, they could not tell how. It was at best only precarious, being carried on in the following singular way –. The besieged had two communications with the river, by secret covered ways from the interior of the fortress. In each of these they had a small windlass, that winded on and let off a line nearly a mile in length. The lines were very small, being made of plaited brass wire; and, putting a buoy on a hook at the end of each one of these, they let them down the water. Their friends knowing the very spot

where they stopped, watched, and put dispatches on the hooks, with fish, beef, venison, and every kind of convenience, which they pulled up below the water, sometimes for a whole night together; and though this proved but a scanty supply for a whole garrison, it was for a long time quite regular, and they depended a good deal on it.

But one night it so chanced that an old fisherman, who fished for the monastery, had gone out with his coble by night to spear salmon in the river. He had a huge blaze flaming in a grate that stood exalted over the prow of his wherry; and with the light of that he pricked the salmon out of their deep recesses with great acuteness. As he was plying his task he perceived a fish of a very uncommon size and form scouring up the river with no ordinary swiftness. At first he started, thinking he had seen the devil: but a fisher generally strikes at every thing he sees in the water. He struck it with his barbed spear, called on Tweed a *leister*, and in a moment had it into his boat. It was an excellent sirloin of beef. The man was in utter amazement, for it was dead, and lay without moving, like other butcher meat; yet he was sure he saw it running up the water at full speed. He never observed the tiny line of plaited wire, nor the hook, which indeed was buried in the lire; and we may judge with what surprise he looked on this wonderful fish – this phenomenon of all aquatic productions. However, as it seemed to lie peaceably enough, and looked very well as a piece of beef, he resolved to let it remain, and betake himself again to his business. Never was there an old man so bewildered as he was, when he again looked into the river – never either on Tweed or any other river on earth. Instead of being floating *down* the river peaceably in his boat, as one naturally expects to do, he discovered that he was running straight against the stream. He expected to have missed about fifty yards of the river by his adventure with the beef; but – no! – instead of that he was about the same distance advanced in his return up the stream. The windlass at the castle, and the invisible wire line, of which he had no conception, having been still dragging him gradually up. ‘Saint Mary, the mother of God, protect and defend poor Sandy Yellowlees!’ cried he; ‘What can be the meaning of this? Is the world turned upside down? Aha! our auld friend, Michael Scott, has some hand i’ this! He’s no to cree legs wi’: I’s be quits wi’ him.’ With that he tumbled his beef again into the water, which held on its course with great

rapidity straight up the stream, while he and his boat returned quietly in the contrary and natural direction.

'Aye, there it goes,' cried Sandy, 'straight on for Aikwood! I's warrant that's for the warlock's an' the deil's dinner the morn. God be praised I'm free o't, or I should soon have been there to!'

Old Sandy fished down the river, but he could kill no more salmon that night – for his nerves had got a shock with this new species of fishing that he could not overcome. He missed one; wounded another on the tail; and struck a third on the rigback, where no leister can pierce a fish, till he made him spring above water. Sandy grew chagrined at himself and the warlock, Michael Scott, too – for this last was what he called 'a real prime fish.' Sandy gripped the leister a little firmer, clenched his teeth, and drew his bonnet over his eyes to shield them from the violence of his blaze. He then banned the wizard into himself, and determined to kill the next fish that made his appearance. But, just as he was keeping watch in this guise, he perceived another fish something like the former, but differing in some degree, coming swagging up the river full speed. 'My heart laup to my teeth,' said Sandy, 'when I saw it coming, and I heaved the leister, but durstna strike; but I lookit weel, an' saw plainly that it was either a side o' mutton or venison, I couldna tell whilk. But I loot it gang, an' shook my head. "Aha, Michael, lad," quo' I, "ye hae countit afore your host for aince! Auld Sandy has beguiled ye. But ye weel expeckit to gie him a canter to hell the night." I rowed my boat to the side, an' made a' the haste hame I could, for I thought auld Michael had taen the water to himself that night.'

Sandy took home his few fish, and went to sleep, for all was quiet about the abbey and the cloisters of his friends, the monks; and when he awoke next morning he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses, regarding what he had seen during the night. He arose and examined his fishes, and could see nothing about them that was not about other salmon. Still he strongly suspected they too might be some connections of Michael's – something illusory, if not worse; and took care to eat none of them himself, delivering them all to the cook of the monastery. The monks ate them, and throve very well; and as Sandy had come by no bodily harm, he determined to try the fishing once again, and if he met with any more such fish of passage to examine them a little better. He went out with his boat, light, and fish-spear as usual; and scarcely had he taken his station, when he

perceived one of a very uncommon nature approaching. He did not strike at it, but only put his leister-grains before it as if to stop its course, when he found the pressure against the leister very strong. On pulling the leister towards him, one of the barbs laid hold of the line by which the phenomenon was led; and not being able to get rid of it, he was obliged to pull it into the boat. It was a small cask of Malmsey wine; and at once, owing to the way it was drawn out, he discovered the hook and line fastened to the end of it. These he disengaged with some difficulty, the pull being so strong and constant; and the mystery was thus found out. In a few minutes afterwards he seized a large sheaf of arrows; and some time after, at considerable intervals, a number of excellent sides of beef and venison.

Sandy Yellowlees saw that he could now fish to some purpose, and formed a resolution of being the last man in the world to tell his countrymen of this resource that the enemy had. The thing of which he was most afraid was a discovery. He knew that the articles would soon be missed, and that his light would betray him; and then a flight of arrows, or even a single one, from a lurking foe at the side of the river, would put an end to his fishing for ever. Such an opportunity was not to be given up, notwithstanding of this danger; so, after much prying, both by day and by night, Sanders found that at an abrupt crook in the water, whatever the line brought up came close to the side, and when the water was low it even trailed them over a point of level sand-bed quite dry. This was a joyous discovery for Sandy. He had nothing ado but to sail down in his boat when it grew dark, and lie lurking at this crook in the water, and make a prey of whatever came within his reach. The very first night he filled his boat half full of valuable stuff. There was a necessity for disposing of a part of this, and Sandy was obliged to aver that he had discovered a hidden store belonging to the English; and, moreover, he hinted that he could supply the towns of Kelso and Roxburgh, the abbey of the one and the priory of the other, for some time to come. Great was the search, that was made about the banks of the river, but no one could find the store; yet Sanders Yellowlees continued to supply the market with luxuries, tho’ no one knew how. Intelligence was sent down the stream, with the buoys, of the seizure of the provisions, and of the place where they were taken off, which they knew from the failure of the weight they were pulling to be always at the same place. The news also spread of Sandy’s stores, and both reached the secret

friends of the English, from whom the provisions were nightly sent to their beseiged friends and benefactors, with all the caution and secrecy possible, it being given them to understand that on that supply alone depended the holding out of the fortress.

Many schemes were now tried to entrap Sandy, but all without effect; for the Scots had a strong post surrounding that very point where Sandy caught all his spoil. It was impossible to reach it but by a boat; and no boat was allowed on the river but that one that belonged to the abbey. At length an English trooper undertook to seize this old depredator. Accordingly, in the dead of the night, when the lines came down, he seized them both, twisted them into one, and walked silently up the side of the river until he came nigh to the spot where the Scots lines on each side joined the stream. He then put the two hooks into his buff belt, and committing himself to the water, was dragged in silence and perfect safety up the pool between the outposts.

The first turn above that was the point where Sandy lay watching. He had only seized one prey that night, and that was of no great value – for they had given over sending up victuals to enrich an old Scots rascal, as they termed honest Sanders. He was glad when he saw the wake of a heavy burden coming slowly towards him. ‘This is a sack o’ sweet-meats,’ said he to himself: ‘It must be currans an raisins, an’ sic fine things as are na injured by the fresh water. I shall get a swinging price from the abbey-men for them, to help wi’ their Christmas pies.’

No sooner did this huge load touch the land, than Sandy seized it with all expedition; but, to his inexpressible horror, the sack of sweetmeats seized him in its turn, and that with such potence that he was instantaneously overpowered. He uttered one piercing cry, and no more, before the trooper gagged and pinioned him. The Scottish lines were alarmed, and all in motion, and the troops on both sides were crowding to the bank of the stream. A party was approaching the spot where the twain were engaged in the unequal struggle. To return down the stream with his prisoner, as he intended, was impracticable; so the trooper had no alternative left but that of throwing himself into Sandy’s boat, with its owner in his arms, shoving her from the side into the deep, and trusting himself to the strength of the wirelines. As the windlasses were made always to exert the same force and no more, by resisting that they could be stopped; so by pushing the boat

from the side in the direction of the castle, the line being slackened, that again set them agoing with great velocity; and though they soon slackened in swiftness, the trooper escaped with his prisoner undiscovered, and, by degrees, was dragged up to the mouth of the covered way that led through or under the hill on which the castle stood; and there was poor Sanders Yellowlees delivered into the hands of his incensed and half-famished enemies. It was he that was hanged over the wall of the castle on the day that the five English yeomen were executed.[fn1]

The English now conceived that their secret was undiscovered, and that their sufferings would forthwith be mitigated by the supply drawn by their lines. They commenced briskly and successfully; but, alas! their success was of short duration. Sanders' secret became known to the Scots army. The night-watchers had often seen the old man's boat leaning on the shore at that point at all hours of the night; for he was always free to go about plodding for fish when he pleased. His cry was heard at that spot, and the boat was now missing: the place was watched, and in two days the Englishmen's secret, on which they so much relied, was discovered, and quite cut off; and that powerful garrison was now left with absolute famine staring them in the face.

As in all cases of utter privation, the men grew ungovernable. Their passions were chafed, and foamed like the ocean before the commencement of a tempest, foreboding nothing but anarchy and commotion. Parties were formed of the most desperate opposition to one another, and every one grew suspicious of his neighbour. Amid all this tempest of passion a mutiny broke out: – a strong party set themselves to deliver up the fortress to the Scots. But through such a medley of jarring opinions what project could succeed? The plot was soon discovered, the ringleaders secured, and Sir Stephen Vernon, Musgrave's most tried and intimate friend, found to be at the head of it. No pen can do justice to the astonishment manifested by Musgrave when the treachery of his dear friend was fully proven. His whole frame and mind received a shock as by electricity, and he gazed around him in moody madness, as not knowing whom to trust, and as if he deemed those around him were going to be his assassins.

'Wretch that I am!' cried he, 'What is there more to afflict and rend this heart? Do I breathe the same air? Do I live among the same men? Do I partake of the same nature and feelings as I was wont? My own friend and

brother Vernon, has he indeed lifted up his hand against me, and become one with my enemies? Whom now shall I trust? Must my dearest hopes – my honour, and the honour of my country, be sacrificed to disaffection and treachery? Oh Vernon – my brother Vernon, how art thou fallen!'

'I confess my crime,' said Vernon; 'and I submit to my fate, since a crime it must be deemed. But it was out of love and affection to you, that your honour might not stoop to our haughty enemies. To hold out the fortress is impossible, and to persevere in the attempt utter depravity. Suppose you feed on one another, before the termination of the Christmas holidays, the remnant that will be left will not be able to guard the sallying ports, even though the ramparts are left unmanned. In a few days I shall see my brave young friend and companion in arms, your brother, disgracefully put down, and ere long the triumphant Scots enter, treading over the feeble remains of this yet gallant army. I may bide a traitor's blame, and be branded with a traitor's name, but it was to save my friends that I strove; for I tell you, and some of you will live to see it, to hold out the castle is impossible.'

'It is false!' cried Musgrave. 'It is false! It is false!' cried every voice present in the judgment-hall, with frantic rage; and all the people, great and small, flew on the culprit to tear him to pieces; for their inveteracy against the Scots still grew with their distress.

'It is false! It is false!' shouted they. 'Down with the traitor! sooner shall we eat the flesh from our own bones than deliver up the fortress to the Scots! Down with the false knave! down with the traitor!' – and, in the midst of a tumult that was quite irresistible, Vernon was borne up on their shoulders, and hurried to execution, smiling with derision at their madness, and repeating their frantic cries in mockery. It was in vain that the commander strove to save his friend – as well might he have attempted to have stemmed the river in its irresistible course single-handed. Vernon and his associates were hanged like dogs, amid shouts of execration, and their bodies flung into a pit. When this was accomplished, the soldiers waved their caps, and cried out, 'So fare it with all who take part with our hateful enemies!'

Musgrave shed tears at the fate of his brave companion, and thenceforward was seized with gloomy despondency; for he saw that subordination hung by a thread so brittle that the least concussion would snap it asunder, and involve all in inextricable confusion. His countenance

and manner underwent a visible change, and he often started on the approach of any one toward him, and laid his hand on his sword. The day appointed by the Douglas for the execution of Sir Richard, provided the castle was not delivered up before that period, was fast approaching – an event that Musgrave could not look forward to without distraction; and it was too evident to his associates that his brave mind was so torn by conflicting passions, that it stood in great danger of being rooted up for ever.

It is probable that at this time he would willingly have complied with the dictates of nature, and saved the life of his brother; but to have talked of yielding up the fortress to the Scots at that period would only have been the prelude to his being torn in pieces. It was no more their captain's affair of love and chivalry that influenced them, but desperate animosity against their besiegers; and every one called aloud for succours. Communication with their friends was impracticable, but they hoped that their condition was known, and that succours would soon appear –. Alas, their friends in Northumberland had enough ado to defend themselves, nor could they do it so effectually but that their lands were sometimes harried to their very doors. The warden, with his hardy mountaineers, was indefatigable; and the English garrison were now so closely beleaguered, that all chance of driving a prey from the country faded from their hopes. Never was the portcullis drawn up, nor the draw-bridge at either end let down, that intelligence was not communicated by blast of bugle to the whole Scottish army, who were instantly on the alert. The latter fared sumptuously, while those within the walls were famishing; and at length the day appointed for the execution of Sir Richard drew so near that three days only were to run.

It had been customary for the English, whenever the Scots sent out a herald, bearing the flag of truce, to make any proposal whatsoever, to salute him with a flight of arrows; all communication or listening to proposals being strictly forbidden by the captain, on pain of death. However, that day, when the Douglas' herald appeared on the rising ground, called the Hill of Barns, Musgrave caused answer him by a corresponding flag, hoping it might be some proposal of a ransom for the life of his beloved brother, on which the heralds had an interchange of words at the draw-bridge. The Scottish herald made demand of the castle in his captain's name, and added, that the Douglas requested it might be done instantly, to save the life of a

brave and noble youth, whom he would gladly spare, but could not break his word and his oath that he should suffer. He farther assured the English captain, that it was in vain for him to sacrifice his brother, for that he had the means in his power to bring him under subjection the day following, if he chose.

A council of the gentlemen in the castle was called. Every one spoke in anger, and treated the demand with derision. Musgrave spoke not a word; but, with a look of unstable attention on every one that spoke, collected their verdicts, and in a few minutes this answer was returned to the requisition of the Scots.

'If Sir Philip Musgrave himself, and every English knight and gentleman in the castle were now in the hands of the Douglas, and doomed to the same fate of their brave young friend, still the Douglas should not gain his point – the castle would not be delivered up. The garrison scorn his proposals, they despise his threats, and they hold his power at defiance. Such tender mercies as he bestows, such shall he experience. He shall only take the castle by treading over the breasts of the last six men that remain alive in it.'

This was the general answer for the garrison – in the meantime Musgrave requested, as a personal favour of the Douglas, that he might see and condole with his brother one hour before his fatal exit. The request was readily complied with, and every assurance of safe conduct and protection added. The Douglas' pavilion stood on the rising ground, between the castle and the then splendid city of Roxburgh, a position from which he had a view of both rivers, and all that passed around the castle, and in the town; but, since the commencement of winter he had lodged over night in a tower that stood in the middle of the High-town, called the King's House, that had prisons underneath, and was strongly guarded; but during the day he continued at the pavilion, in order to keep an eye over the siege.

To this pavilion, therefore, Musgrave was suffered to pass, with only one knight attendant; and all the way from the drawbridge to the tent they passed between two files of armed soldiers, whose features, forms, and armour exhibited a strange contrast. The one rank was made up of Mar Highlanders; men short of stature, with red locks, high cheek bones, and looks that indicated a ferocity of nature; the other was composed of Lowlanders from the dales of the south and the west; men clothed in grey,

with sedate looks, strong athletic frames, and faces of blunt and honest bravery. Musgrave weened himself passing between the ranks of two different nations, instead of the vassals of one Scottish nobleman. At the pavilion, the state, splendour, and number of attendant knights and squires amazed him; but by them all he was received with the most courteous respect.

Sir Richard was brought up from the vaults of the King's House to the tent, as the most convenient place for the meeting with his brother, and for the guards to be stationed around them; and there, being placed in one of the apartments of the pavilion, his brother was ushered in to him. No one was present at the meeting; but, from an inner apartment, all that passed between them was overheard. Musgrave clasped his younger brother in his arms; the other could not return the embrace, for his chains were not taken off; but their meeting was passionately affecting, as the last meeting between two brothers must always be. When the elder retired a step, that they might gaze on each other, what a difference in appearance! – what a contrast they exhibited to each other! The man in chains, doomed to instant death, had looks of blooming health, and manly fortitude: The free man, the renowned Lord Musgrave, governor of the impregnable but perilous castle of Roxburgh, and the affianced lord and husband to the richest and most beautiful lady in England, was the picture of haggard despair and misfortune. He appeared but the remnant, the skeleton of the hero he had lately been; and a sullen instability of mind flashed loweringly in his dark eye. His brother was almost terrified at his looks, for he regarded him sometimes as with dark suspicion, and as if he dreaded him to be an incendiary.

'My dear brother,' said Sir Richard, 'what is it that hangs upon your mind, and discomposes you so much? You are indeed an altered man since I had the misfortune to be taken from you. Tell me, how fares all within the castle?'

'Oh, very well; quite well, brother. All perfectly secure – quite well within the castle.' But as he said this he strode rapidly backward and forward across the small apartment, and eyed the canvass on each side with a grin of rage, as if he suspected that it concealed listeners; nor was he wrong in his conjecture, though it was only caused by the frenzy of habitual distrust. 'But, how can I be otherwise than discomposed, brother,' continued

he, ‘when I am in so short a time to see you sacrificed in the prime of youth and vigour, to my own obstinacy and pride, perhaps.’

‘I beg that you will not think of it, or take it at all to heart,’ said the youth; ‘I have made up my mind, and can look death in the face without unbecoming dismay. I should have preferred dying on the field of honour, with my sword in my hand, rather than being hanged up between the hosts, like a spy, or common malefactor. But let the tears that are shed for Richard be other than salt brine from the eyes of the Englishmen. Let them be the drops of purple blood from the hearts of our enemies. I charge you, by the spirits of our fathers, whom I am so shortly to join, and by the blessed Trinity, that you act in this trying dilemma as the son of the house you represent. Shed not a tear for me, but revenge my death on the haughty house of Douglas.’

‘There is my hand! Here is my sword! But the vital motion, or the light of reason, who shall ensure to me till these things are fulfilled? Nay, who shall ensure them to this wasted frame for one moment? I am not the man I have been, brother: But here I will swear to you, by all the host of heaven, to revenge your death, or die in the fulfilment of my vow. Yes, fully will I revenge it! I will waste! waste! waste! and the fire that is begun within shall be quenched, and no tongue shall utter it! Ha! Ha, Ha! shall it not be so, brother?’

‘This is mere raving, brother; I have nothing from this.’

‘No, it is not; for there is a fire that you wot not of. But I will quench it, though with my own blood. Brother, there is one thing I wish to know, and for that purpose did I come hither. Do you think it behoves me to suffer you to perish in this affair?’

‘That depends entirely upon your internal means of defence,’ answered Richard. ‘If there is a certainty, or even a probability, that the castle can hold until relieved by our friends, which will not likely be previous to the time you have appointed for them to attempt it; why, then, I would put no account on the life of one man. Were I in your place, I would retain my integrity in opposition to the views of Douglas; but if it is apparent to you, who knows all your own resources, that the castle must yield, it is needless to throw away the life of your brother, sacrificing it to the pride of opposition for a day or a week.’

Musgrave seemed to be paying no regard to this heroic and disinterested reasoning – for he was still pacing to and fro, gnawing his lip; and if he was reasoning, or thinking at all, was following out the train of his own unstable mind – 'Because, if I were sure,' said he, 'that you felt that I was acting unkindly or unnaturally by you, by the Rood, I would carve the man into fragments that would oppose my submission to save my brother. I would teach them that Musgrave was not to be thwarted in his command of the castle that was taken by his own might and device, and to the government of which his sovereign appointed him. If a dog should dare to bay at me in opposition to my will, whatever it were, I would muzzle the hound, and make him repent his audacity.'

'My noble brother,' said Richard, 'what is the meaning of this frenzy? No one is opposing your will, and I well believe no one within the castle will attempt it—'

'Because they dare not!' said he, furiously, interrupting his brother: 'They dare not, I tell you! But if they durst, what do you think I would do? Ha, ha, ha!'

Douglas overheard all this, and judging it a fit time to interfere, immediately a knight opened the door of the apartment where the two brothers conversed, and announced the Lord Douglas. Musgrave composed himself with wonderful alacrity; and the greeting between the two great chiefs, though dignified, was courteous and apparently free of rancour or jealousy. Douglas first addressed his rival as follows:

'I crave pardon, knights, for thus interrupting you. I will again leave you to yourselves; but I judged it incumbent on me, as a warrior and a knight of honour, to come, before you settled finally on your mode of procedure, and conjure you, Lord Philip Musgrave, to save the life of your brother—'

'Certainly you will not put down my brave brother, Lord Douglas?' said Musgrave, interrupting him.

'As certainly,' returned he, 'as you put down my two kinsmen, Cleland and Douglas of Rowlaw, in mere spite and wanton cruelty, because they were beloved and respected by me. I am blameless, as it was yourself who began this unwarrantable system, and my word is passed. Sir Richard must die, unless the keys of the castle are delivered to me before Friday at noon. But I shall be blameless in any thing further. I conjure you to save him; and as an inducement, assure you, by the honour of knighthood, that your

resistance is not only unnatural, but totally useless; for I have the means of commanding your submission when I please.'

'Lord Douglas, I defy thee!' answered Musgrave. 'You hold the life in your hand that I hold dearest on earth, save one. For these two would I live or die; but, since thy inveterate enmity will not be satisfied with ought short of the life of my only brother, take it; and may my curse, and the curse of heaven, be your guerdon. It shall only render the other doubly dear to me; and, for her sake, will I withstand your proud pretensions; and, as she enjoined me, hold this castle, with all its perils, till the expiry of the Christmas holidays, in spite of you. I defy your might and your ire. Let your cruel nature have its full sway. Let it be gorged with the blood of my kinsfolk; it shall only serve to make my opposition the stronger and more determined. For the sake of her whom I serve, the mistress of my heart and soul, I will hold my resolution –. Do your worst!'

'So be it!' said Douglas. 'Remember that I do not, like you, fight only in the enthusiasm of love and chivalry, but for the very being of my house. I will stick at no means of retaliating the injuries you have done to me and mine, however unjustifiable these may appear to some – no act of cruelty, to attain the prize for which I contend. Little do you know what you are doomed to suffer, and that in a short space of time. I again conjure you to save the life of your brother, by yielding up to me your ill-got right, and your conditions shall be as liberal as you can desire.'

'I will yield you my estate to save my brother, but not the castle of Roxburgh. Name any other ransom but that, and I will treat with you. Ask what I can grant with honour, and command it.'

'Would you give up the life of a brave only brother to gratify the vanity and whim of a romantic girl, who, if present herself, would plead for the life of Sir Richard, maugre all other considerations, else she has not the feelings of woman? What would you give, Lord Musgrave, to see that lady, and hear her sentiments on the subject?'

'I would give much to see her. But, rather than see her in this place, I would give all the world and my life's blood into the bargain. But of that I need not have any fear. You have conjurors among you, it is said, and witches that can raise up the dead, but their power extends not to the living, else who of my race would have been left?'

‘I have more power than you divine; and I will here give you a simple specimen of it, to convince you how vain it is to contend with me. You are waging war with your own vain imagination, and suffer all this wretchedness for a thing that has neither being nor name.’

Douglas then lifted a small gilded bugle that hung always at his sword belt, the language of which was well known to all the army; and on that he gave two blasts not louder than a common whistle, when instantly the door of the apartment opened, and there entered Lady Jane Howard, leaning on her female attendant, dressed in attire of princely magnificence. ‘Lady Jane Howard!’ exclaimed Sir Richard, starting up, and struggling with his fettered arms to embrace her. But when the vision met the eyes of Lord Musgrave, he uttered a shuddering cry of horror, and sprung with a convulsive leap back into the corner of the tent. There he stood, like the statue of distraction, with his raised hands pressed to each side of his helmet, as if he had been strenuously holding his head from splitting asunder.

‘So! Friend and foe have combined against me!’ cried he wildly. ‘Earth and hell have joined their forces in opposition to one impotent human thing! And what his crime? He presumed on no more than what he did, and could have done; but who can stand against the powers of darkness, and the unjust decrees of heaven? Yes; unjust! I say unjust! Down with all decrees to the centre! There’s no truth in heaven! I weened there was, but it is as false as the rest! I say as false! – falser than both! – I’ll brave all the three! Ha, ha, ha!’

Douglas had brought Lady Jane the apparel, and commanded her to dress in it; and, perceiving the stern, authoritative nature of the chief, she judged it meet to comply. At first she entered with a languid dejected look, for she had been given to understand something of the rueful nature of the meeting she was called on to attend. But when she heard the above infuriated rhapsody, and turned her eyes in terror to look on the speaker, whose voice she well knew, she uttered a scream and fainted. Douglas supported her in his arms; and Sir Richard, whose arms were in fetters, stood and wept over her. But Musgrave himself only strode to and fro over the floor of the pavilion, and uttered now and then a frantic laugh. ‘That is well! – That is well!’ exclaimed he; ‘just as it should be! I hope she will not recover. Surely she will not?’ and then bending himself back, and clasping his hands

together, he cried fervently: ‘O mother of God, take her to thyself while she is yet pure and uncontaminated, or what heart of flesh can endure the prospect? What a wreck in nature that lovely form will soon be! Oh-oh-oh!’

The lady’s swoon was temporary. She soon began to revive, and cast unsettled looks around in search of the object that had so overpowered her; and, at the request of Sir Richard, who perceived his brother’s intemperate mood, she was removed. She was so struck with the altered features, looks, and deportment of the knight, who in her imagination was every thing that was courteous, comely, and noble, and whom she had long considered as destined to be her own, that her heart was unable to stand the shock, and her removal from his presence was an act of humanity.

She was supported out of the tent by Douglas and her female relation; but when Musgrave saw them leading her away, he stepped rapidly in before them and interposed; and, with a twist of his body, put his hand two or three times to the place where the handle of his sword should have been. The lady lifted her eyes to him, but there was no conception in that look, and her lovely face was as pale as if the hand of death had passed over it.

Any one would have thought that such a look from the lady of his love, in such a forlorn situation, and in the hands of his mortal enemy, would have totally uprooted the last fibres of his distempered mind. But who can calculate on the medicine suited to a diseased spirit? The cures even of some bodily diseases are those that would poison a healthy frame. So did it prove in this mental one. He lifted his hand from his left side, where he had thrust it convulsively in search of his sword, and clapping it on his forehead, he seemed to resume the command of himself at once, and looked as calm and serene as in the most collected moments of his life.

When they were gone, he said to Sir Richard, in the hearing of the guards: ‘Brother, what is the meaning of this? What English traitor has betrayed that angelic maid into the hands of our enemy?’

‘To me it is incomprehensible,’ said Sir Richard: ‘I was told of it by my keeper last night, but paid no regard to the information, judging it a piece of wanton barbarity; but now my soul shudders at the rest of the information that he added.’

‘What more did the dog say?’ said Musgrave.

‘He said he had heard that it was resolved by the Douglasses, that, if you did not yield up the fortress and citadel freely, on or before the day of the

conception of the Blessed Virgin, on that day at noon the lady of your heart should be exhibited in a state not to be named on a stage erected on the top of the Bush-law, that faces the western tower, and is divided from it only by the moat; and there before your eyes, and in sight of both hosts, compelled to yield to that disgrace which barbarians only could have conceived; and then to have her nose cut off, her eyes put out, and her beauteous frame otherwise disfigured.'

'He dares not for his soul's salvation do such a deed!' said Musgrave; 'No; there's not a bloodhound that ever mouthed the air of his cursed country durst do a deed like that. And though every Douglas is a hound confest, where is the mongrel among them that durst but howl of such an outrage in nature? Why, the most absolute fiend would shrink from it: Hell would disown it; and do you think the earth would bear it?'

'Brother, suspend your passion, and listen to the voice of reason and of nature. Your cause is lost, but not your honour. You took, and have kept that fortress, to the astonishment of the world. But for what do you now fight? or what can your opposition avail? Let me beseech you not to throw away the lives of those you love most on earth thus wantonly, but capitulate on honourable terms, and rescue your betrothed bride and your only brother from the irritated Scots. Trust not that they will stick at any outrage to accomplish their aim. Loth would I be to know our name were dishonoured by any pusillanimity on the part of my brother; but desperate obstinacy is not bravery. I, therefore, conjure you to save me, and her in whom all your hopes of future felicity are bound up.'

Musgrave was deeply affected; and, at that instant, before he had time to reply, Douglas re-entered.

'Scots lord, you have overcome me,' said he, with a pathos that could not be exceeded: 'Yes you have conquered, but not with your sword. Not on the field, nor on the wall, have ye turned the glaive of Musgrave; but either by some infernal power, or else by chicanery and guile, the everlasting resources of your cursed nation. It boots not me to know how you came possessed of this last and only remaining pledge of my submission. It is sufficient you have it. I yield myself your prisoner; let me live or die with those two already in your power.'

'No, knight, that must not be,' replied Douglas, 'You are here on safe conduct and protection; my honour is pledged, and must not be forfeited.

You shall return in safety to your kinsmen and soldiers, and act by their counsel. It is not prisoners I want, but the castle of Roxburgh, which is the right of my sovereign and my nation – clandestinely taken, and wrongously held by you. I am neither cruel nor severe beyond the small range that points to that attainment; but that fortress I will have – else wo be to you, and all who advise withholding it, as well as all their connexions to whom the power of Scotland can extend. If the castle is not delivered up before Friday at noon, your brother shall suffer – that you already know. But at the same hour on the day of the Conception, if it is still madly and wantonly detained, there shall be such a scene transacted before your eyes as shall blur the annals of the Border for ever.'

'If you allude to any injury intended to the lady who is your prisoner,' said Musgrave, 'the cruellest fiend in hell could not have the heart to hurt such angelic purity and loveliness; and it would degrade the honour of knighthood for ever to suffer it. Cruel as you are, you dare not injure a hair of her head.'

'Talk not of cruelty in me,' said Douglas: 'If the knight who is her lover will not save her, how should I? You have it in your power, and certainly it is you that behove to do it; even granting that the stakes for which we fought were equal, the task of redemption and the blame would rest solely with you. And how wide is the difference between the prizes for which we contend? I for my love, my honour, and the very existence of my house and name; and you for you know not what – the miserable pride of opposition. Take your measures, my lord. I will not be mocked.'

Douglas left the apartment. Musgrave also arose and embraced his brother, and, as he parted from him, he spoke these ominous words: 'Farewell, my dear Richard. May the angels that watch over honour be your guardians in the hour of trial. You know not what I have to endure from tormentors without and within. But hence we meet not again in this state of existence. The ties of love must be broken, and the bands of brotherly love burst asunder – nevertheless I will save you – A long farewell my brother.'

Musgrave was then conducted back to the draw-bridge, between two long files of soldiers as before, while all the musicians that belonged either to the army or the city were ranked up in a line behind them, on the top of the great precipice that overhangs the Teviot, playing, on all manner of instruments, '*Turn the Blue Bonnets wha can, wha can*,' with such a

tremendous din that one would have thought every stone in the walls of Roxburgh was singing out the bravado.

CHAPTER 8

Quhat weywerde elfin thynge is thaten boie,
That hyngethe still upon myne gaire, as doeth
My synne of harte? And quhome rychte loth, I lofe
With not les hanckerynge. His locent eyne,
And his tungis maiter comethe on myne sense
Lyke a remembourance; or lyke ane dreime
That had delytis in it. Quhen I wolde say
'Begone;' lo then my tung mistakethe quyte,
Or fanceyinge not the terme, it sayethe 'Come hidder,
Come hidder, crabbed boie, unto myne syde.'

Old Play

That evening, after the departure of the noble and distressed Musgrave, Douglas was sitting all alone musing in a secret apartment of the pavilion, when he heard a gentle tap at the door. 'Who's there?' inquired he surlily: 'It is I, my lor',' said a petulant treble voice without. 'Aha! my excellent nondescript little fellow, Colin Roy, is it you? Why, you may come in.' Colin entered dressed in a most elegant and whimsical livery, and, forgetting himself, made the Douglas two or three graceful courtesies instead of bows.

'Aye, hem,' said he, 'that's very well for the page of a princess. I suppose you have been studying the graces from your accomplished mistress? But where have you been all this while? I have felt the loss of you from my hand grievously.'

'I have been waiting on my royal mistress, my lor', informing her of all that is going on at the siege, and of your good fortune in the late captures you have made, wherein she rejoices exceedingly, and wishes you all good fortune and forward success; and, in token of kind remembrance, she sends you this heart of ruby set in gold and diamonds – a gem that befits your lordship well to wear. And many more matters she has given me in charge, my lor'.'

Douglas kissed the locket, and put it in his bosom, and then uttered abundance of the extravagant bombast peculiar to that age. He called her his guardian angel, his altar of incense, and the saint of his devotion, the buckler of his arm, the sword in his hand, and the jewel of his heart. 'Do you think, Colin,' added he, 'that ever there was a maiden born like this royal lady of my love?'

'Why, my lor', I am not much skilled in these matters, but I believe the wench, my mistress, is well enough; – that is, she is well formed. And yet she is but so so.'

'How dare you, you piece of unparalleled impudence, talk of your royal mistress in that strain? Or where did you ever see a form or features so elegant, and so bewitchingly lovely?'

'Do you think so? – Well, I'm glad of it. I think she is coarse and masculine. Where did I ever see such a form, indeed! Yes I have seen a much finer limb, and an arm, and a hand too! What think you of that for a hand, my lor'?' – (and with that the urchin clapped his hand on the green table, first turning up the one side of it and then the other.) – 'I say if that hand were as well kept, and that arm as well loaden with bracelets, and the fingers with diamond rings, it would be as handsome as your princess's, of which you boast so much – aye, and handsomer too.'

'You are a privileged boy, Colin, otherwise I would kick you heartily, and, moreover, cause you to be whipped by the hand of the common executioner. However, you are a confidant – all is well from you; and, to say the truth, yours is a very handsome hand for a boy's hand – so is your arm. But what are they to those of my lovely and royal Margaret? – mere deformity! the husk to the wheat!'

'Indeed, my lor', you have an excellent taste, and a no less gifted discernment!'

'I cannot conceive of any earthly being equalling my beauteous princess, whether in the qualifications of body or mind.'

'I rejoice to hear it. How blind love is! Why, in sober reality, there is the Lady Jane Howard. Is there any comparison between the princess and that lady in beauty?'

'She is, I confess, a most exquisite creature, Colin, even though rival to my adorable lady; in justice it must be acknowledged she is *almost* peerless in beauty. I do not wonder at Musgrave's valour when I see the object of it.

But why do you redden as with anger, boy, to hear my commendations of that hapless lady?'

'I, my lord? How should I redden with anger? On my honour, craving my Lord Douglas' pardon, I am highly pleased. I think she is much more beautiful than you have said, and that you should have spoken of her in a more superlative degree, and confessed frankly that you would willingly exchange your betrothed lady for her. I cannot chuse but think her very beautiful; too beautiful, indeed, with her blue eyes, white teeth, and ruddy lips. I don't like such bright blue eyes. I could almost find in my heart to scratch them out, she is so like a wanton. So you don't wonder at Lord Musgrave's valour, after having seen his mistress? Well, I advise your lordship, your captainship, and your besiegership, that there are some who wonder very much at your *want* of valour. I tell you this in confidence. My mistress thinks you hold her charms only at a small avail, that you have not *gone into* that castle long ago, and turned out these Englishmen, or hung them up by the necks if they refused. Musgrave went in and took it at once, for the favour of his mistress; because, forsooth, he deemed her worthy of the honour of such a bold emprize. Why, then, do not you do the same? My mistress, to be sure, is a woman – a very woman; but she says this, that it is superabundantly ungallant of you not to have *gone in* and taken possession of the castle long ago. Do you know that (poor kind creature!) she has retired to a convent, where she continues in a state of sufferance, using daily invocations at the shrines of saints for your success. And she has, moreover, made a vow not to braid her hair, nor dress herself in princely apparel until the day of your final success. Surely, my lor', you ought *to take that castle*, and relieve my dear mistress from this durance. I almost weep when I think of her, and must say with her that she has been shabbily used, and that she has reason to envy Lady Jane Howard even in her captivity.'

'Colin, you are abundantly impertinent: but there is no stopping of your tongue once it is set a-going. As to the taking of castles, these things come not under the cognizance of boys or women. But indeed I knew not that my sovereign lady the princess had absconded from the courtly circle of her father's palace, and betaken herself to a convent on my account. Every thing that I hear of that jewel endears her to me the more.'

‘What? even her orders for you *to go into the castle*, and put out the English? I assure you, my lor’, she insists upon it. Whether it is her impatience to be your bride, I know not, but she positively will not be satisfied unless you very soon *go into that castle*, and put the Englishmen all to the outside of it, where you are now; or hang them, and bury them out of sight before she visits the place to congratulate you.’

‘Boy, I have no patience with you. Cease your prating, and inform me where my beloved mistress is, that I may instantly visit her.’

‘No; not for the Douglas’ estate, which is now in the fire, and may soon be brought to the anvil, will I inform you of that. But, my lor’, you know I must execute my commission. And I tell you again, unless you take this castle very soon, you will not only lose the favour of my mistress, but you will absolutely break her heart. Nothing less will satisfy her. I told her, there was a great moat, more than a hundred feet deep, and as many wide, that surrounded the castle, and flowed up to the base of its walls; that there was a large river on each side of it, and that they were both dammed and appeared like two standing seas – but all availed nought. “There is a moat,” said I; “But let him go over that,” said she; “let him swim it, or put a float on it. What is it to cross a pool a hundred feet wide? How did Lord Musgrave pass over it?” “There are strong walls on the other side,” said I: “But let him go over these,” said she, “or break a hole through them and go in. Men built the walls, why may not men pull them down? How did Musgrave get over them?” “There are armed men within,” said I: “But they are only Englishmen,” said she; “Let Douglas’ men put their swords into them, and make them stand back. How did Musgrave get in when it was defended by gallant Scots? Douglas is either no lover, or else no warrior,” added she; “or perhaps he is neither the one nor the other.”’

‘Peace, sapling,’ said Douglas, frowning and stamping with his foot, ‘Peace, and leave the pavilion instantly.’ Colin went away visibly repressing a laugh, which irritated Douglas still the more; and as the urchin went, he muttered in a crying whine, ‘My mistress is very shabbily used! – very shabbily! To have promised herself to a knight if he will but take a castle for her, and to have fasted, and prayed, and vowed vows for him, and yet he dares not go in and take it. And I am shabbily used too; and that I’ll tell her! Turned out before I get half her message delivered! But I must inform you, my lor’, before I go, that since you are making no better use of the

advantage given you, I demand the prisoners back that I lodged in your hand in my lady mistress' name, and by her orders.'

'I will do no such thing to the whim of a teasing impertinent stripling, without my lady princess's hand and seal for it,' said Douglas.

'You shall not long want that,' said Colin; and pulling a letter out from below his sash, he gave it to him. It was the princess's hand and seal – it being an easy matter for Colin to get what letters he listed. Douglas opened it, and read as follows:

> 'LORD DOUGLAS – In token of my best wishes for your success, I send you these, with greeting. I hope you will take immediate advantage of the high superiority afforded you in this contest, by putting some indelible mark, or public stain, on the lusty dame I put into your hands. If Musgrave be a knight of any gallantry he will never permit it, but yield. As I cannot attend personally, I request that the mode and degree of punishment you inflict may be left to my page Colin. That you have not been successful by such means already, hath much surprised
>
> MARGARET.'

'This is not a requisition to give you up the prisoners,' said Douglas, 'but merely a request that the punishment inflicted may be left to you, a request which must not be denied to the lady of my heart. Now, pray, Master Colin Roy MacAlpin, what punishment do you decree for the Lady Jane Howard? For my part, though I intended to threaten the most obnoxious treatment, to induce my opponent to yield, I could not for my dearest interests injure the person of that exquisite lady.'

'You could not, in good troth? I suppose my mistress has good reason to be jealous of you two. But since the power is left with me I shall prevent that; I shall see her punished as she deserves: I'll have no shameful exposures of a woman, even were she the meanest plebeian, but I'll mar her beauty that she thinks so much of, and that *you* think so much of. I'll have her nose cut off; and two of her fore teeth drawn; and her cheeks and brow scolloped. I'll spoil the indecent brightness of her gloss! She shall not sparkle with such brilliance again, nor shall the men gloat, feasting their intolerable eyes on her, as they do at present.'

'Saint Duthoc buckler me!' exclaimed the Douglas – 'what an unnatural tyger cat it is! I have heard that such feelings were sometimes entertained by one sovereign beauty toward another of the same sex; but that a sprightly youth, of an amorous complexion, with bright blushing features and carroty

locks, should so depreciate female beauty, and thirst to deface it, surpasses any thing I have witnessed in the nature of man. Go to, you are a perverse boy, but shall be humoured as far as my honour and character as a captain and warrior will admit.'

Colin paced lightly away, making a slight and graceful courtesy to the Douglas as he glided out. 'What an extraordinary, wayward, and accomplished youth that is!' said the chief to himself: 'Is it not strange that I should converse so long with a page, as if he were my equal? There is something in his manner and voice that overcomes me; and though he teazes me beyond endurance, there is a sort of enchantment about him, that I cannot give him the check. Ah me! all who submit themselves to women, to be swayed by them or their delegates, will find themselves crossed in every action of importance. I am resolved that no woman shall sway me. I can love, but have not learned to submit.'

Colin retired to his little apartment in the pavilion; it was close to the apartment that Douglas occupied while he remained there, and not much longer or broader than the beautiful and romantic inhabitant. Yet there he constantly abode when not employed about his lord, and never mixed or conversed with the other pages. Douglas retired down to the tower, or King's House, as it was called (from King Edward having occupied it,) at even tide – but Colin Roy remained in his apartment at the pavilion. Alas! that Douglas did not know the value of the life he left exposed in such a place!

On the return of Musgrave into the castle, a council of all the gentlemen in the fortress was called, and with eager readiness they attended in the hall of the great western tower. The governor related to them the heart-rending intelligence of his mistress being in the hands of their enemies, and of the horried fate that awaited her, as well as his only brother, provided the garrison stood out. Every one present perceived that Musgrave inclined to capitulate; and, as they all admired him, they pitied his woeful plight. But no one ventured a remark. There they sat, a silent circle, in bitter and obstinate rumination. Their brows were plaited down, so as almost to cover their eyes; their under lips were bent upward, and every mouth shaped like a curve, and their arms were crossed on their breasts, while every man's right hand instinctively rested on the hilt of his sword.

Musgrave had taken his measures, whichever way the tide should run. In consequence of this he appeared more calm and collected at this meeting than he had done for many a day. ‘I do not, my friends, and soldiers, propose any alternative,’ said he – ‘I merely state to you the circumstances in which we are placed; and according to your sentiments I mean to conduct myself.’

‘It is nobly said, brave captain,’ said Collingwood: ‘Our case is indeed a hard one, but not desperate. The Scots cannot take the castle from us, and shall any one life, or any fifty lives, induce us to yield them the triumph, and all our skill, our bravery, and our sufferings go for nought?’

‘We have nothing to eat,’ said Musgrave.

‘I’ll eat the one arm, and defend the draw-bridge with the other, before the Scots shall set a foot in the castle,’ said a young man, named Henry Clavering. ‘So will I,’ said another. ‘So will I; so will we all!’ echoed through the hall, while a wild gleam of ferocity fired every haggard countence. It was evident that the demon of animosity and revenge was now conjured up, which to lay was not in the power of man.

‘What then do you propose as our mode of action in this grievous dilemma?’ said Musgrave.

‘I, for my part, would propose decision and ample retaliation.’ said Clavering. ‘Do you not perceive that there has been a great storm in the uplands last night and this morning, and that the Tweed and Teviot are roaring like two whirlpools of the ocean, so that neither man nor beast can cross them? There is no communication between the two great divisions of the Scottish army tonight, save by that narrow passage betwixt the moat and the river. Let us issue forth at the deepest hour of midnight, secure that narrow neck of land by a strong guard, while the rest proceed sword in hand to the eastern camp, surround the pavilion of Douglas, and take him and all his associates prisoners, and then see who is most forward in using the rope!’

‘It is gallantly proposed, my brave young friend,’ said Musgrave; ‘I will lead the onset myself. I do not only ween the scheme practicable, but highly promising; and if we can make good that narrow neck of land against our enemies on the first alarm, I see not why we may not cut off every man in the eastern division of their army; and haply, from the camp and city, secure to ourselves a good supply of provisions before the break of the day.’

These were inducements not to be withstood, and there was not one dissenting voice. A gloomy satisfaction rested on every brow, and pervaded every look, taking place of dark and hideous incertitude. Like a winter day that has threatened a tempest from the break of the morning, but becomes at last no longer doubtful, as the storm descends on the mountain tops, so was the scene at the breaking up of that meeting – and all was activity and preparation within the castle during the remainder of the day.

The evening at last came; but it was no ordinary evening. The storm had increased in a tenfold degree. The north-west wind roared like thunder. The sleet descended in torrents, and was driven with an impetuosity that no living creature could withstand. The rivers foamed from bank to brae; and the darkness was such as if the heavens had been sealed up. The sound of the great abbey bell, that rung for vespers, was borne away on the tempest; so that nothing was heard, save once or twice a solemn melancholy sound, apparently at a great distance, as if a spirit had been moaning in the eastern sky.

Animal nature cowered beneath the blast. The hind left not her den in the wood, nor broke her fast, until the dawning. The flocks crowded together for shelter in the small hollows of the mountains, and the cattle lowed and bellowed in the shade. The Scottish soldiers dozed under their plaids, or rested on their arms within the shelter of their tents and trenches. Even the outer sentinels, on whose vigilance all depended, crept into some retreat or other that was next to hand, to shield them from the violence of the storm. The army was quite secure – for they had the garrison so entirely cooped up within their walls, that no attempt had been made to sally forth for a whole month. Indeed, ever since the English were fairly dislodged from the city, the Bush-law, and all the other outworks, the attempt was no more dreaded; for the heaving up of the portcullis, and the letting down of the draw-bridge, made such a noise as at once alarmed the Scottish watchers, and all were instantly on the alert. Besides, the gates and draw-bridges (for there were two gates and one draw-bridge at each end) were so narrow, that it took a long time for an enemy to pass in any force; and thus it proved an easy matter to prevent them. But, that night, the storm howling in such majesty, and the constant jangling of chains and pullies swinging to its force, with the roaring of the two rivers over the dams, formed altogether such a hellish concert, that fifty portcullises might have been raised, and as many draw-

bridges let down, and the prostrate shivering sentinels of the Scottish army have distinguished no additional chord or octave in the infernal bravura.

At midnight the English issued forth with all possible silence. Two hundred, under the command of Grey and Collingwood, were posted on the castle-green, that is, the narrow valley between the moat and the river Tweed, to prevent the junction of the two armies on the first alarm being given. The rest were parted into two divisions; and, under the command of Musgrave and Henry Clavering, went down the side of each river so as to avoid the strongest part of the Scottish lines, and the ramparts raised on the height. Clavering led his division down by the side of the Teviot, along the bottom of the great precipice, and, owing to the mingled din of the flood and the storm, was never perceived till fairly in the rear of the Scottish lines. Musgrave was not so fortunate, as the main trench ran close to the Tweed. He was obliged to force it with his first column, which he did with a rapidity which nothing could equal. The Englishmen threw themselves over the mound of the great trench, hurling in above their enemies sword in hand, and overpowering them with great ease; then over one breastwork after another, spreading consternation before them and carnage behind. Clavering heard nothing of this turmoil, so intemperate was the night. He stood with impatience, his men drawn up in order, within half a bow-shot of Douglas's pavilion, waiting for the signal agreed on; for their whole energy was to be bent against the tent of the commander, in hopes, not only to capture the Douglas himself, and all his near kinsmen, but likewise their own prisoners. At length, among other sounds that began to swell around, Clavering heard the welcome cry of 'DUDDOE'S AWAY!' which was a readily answered with 'DUDDOE'S HERE!' and at one moment the main camp was attacked on both sides. The flyers from the lines had spread the alarm. The captain's tent was surrounded by a triple circle of lesser tents, all full of armed men, who instantly grasped their weapons, and stood on the defensive. Many rough blows were exchanged at the first onset, and many of the first ranks of the assailants met their death. But though those within fought with valour, they fought without system; whereas the English had arranged every thing previously; and each of them had a white linen belt, of which the Scots knew nothing. And in the hurry and terror that ensued, some parties attacked each other, and fell by the hands of their brethren.

Finding soon that the battle raged before and behind them, they fled with precipitation toward the city; but there they were waylaid by a strong party, and many of them captured and slain. The English would have slain every man that fell into their power, had it not been for the hopes of taking Douglas, or some of his near kinsmen, and by that means redeeming the precious pledges that the Scots held, so much to their detriment, and by which all their motions were paralyzed. Clavering, with a part of the troops under his command, pursued the flyers that escaped as far as the head of the Market-street, and put the great Douglas himself into no little dismay; for he found it next to impossible to rally his men amid the storm and darkness, such a panic had seized them by this forth-breaking of their enemies. Clavering would, doubtless, have rifled a part of the city, if not totally ruined that division of the Scottish army, had he not been suddenly called back to oppose a more dangerous inroad behind.

When Musgrave first broke through the right wing of the Scottish lines, the noise and uproar spread amain, as may well be conceived. The warders on the heights then sounded the alarm incessantly: and a most incongrous thing it was to hear them sounding the alarm with such vigour at their posts, after the enemy had passed quietly by them, and at that time were working havoc in the middle of their camp. They knew not what was astir, but they made plenty of din with their cowhorns, leaving those that they alarmed to find out the cause the best way they could.

The Scottish army that beleaguered the castle to the westward caught the alarm, and rushed to the support of their brethren and commander. The infantry being first in readiness, were first put in motion, but, on the narrowest part of the castle green, they fell in with the firm set phalanx of the English, who received them on the point of their lances, and, in a few seconds, made them give way. The English could not however pursue, their orders being to keep by the spot where they were, and stand firm; so that the Scots had nothing ado but to rally at the head of the green, and return to the charge. Still it was with no better success than before. The English stood their ground, and again made them reel and retreat. But, by this time, the horsemen were got ready, and descended to the charge at a sharp trot. They were clad in armour, and had heavy swords by their sides, and long spears like halberds in their hands. The English lines could not withstand the shock given by these, for the men were famishing with hunger and benumbed with

cold, the wind blowing with all its fury straight in their faces. They gave way; but they were neither broken nor dispersed. Reduced as they were, they were all veterans, and retreated fighting till they came to the barriers before the draw-bridge; and there, having the advantage of situation, they stood their ground.

The horsemen passed on to the scene of confusion in the camp, and came upon the rear of the English host, encumbered with prisoners and spoil.

When Clavering was called back, Douglas, who had now rallied about one hundred and forty men around him, wheeled about, and followed Clavering in the rear; so that the English found themselves in the same predicament that the Scots were in about an hour before – beset before and behind – and that principally by horsemen, which placed them under a manifest disadvantage.

It is impossible to give any adequate idea of the uproar and desperate affray that now ensued. The English formed on both sides to defend themselves; but the prisoners being numerous detained a great part of the men from the combat. A cry arose to kill the prisoners; from whom it first issued no one knew, but it no sooner past than the men began to put it into execution. The order was easier to give than perform: in half a minute every one of the guards had a prisoner at his throat – the battle became general – every one being particularly engaged through all the interior of the host, many of them struggling in pairs on the earth, who to get uppermost, and have the mastery. It was all for life, and no exertion was withheld; but, whenever these single combats ended in close gripes, the Scots had the mastery, their bodies being in so much better condition. They made a great noise, both individually and in their files, but the English scarcely opened their mouths; like bred mastiffs, when desperately engaged, they only aimed at the vital parts of their opponents, without letting their voices be heard.

It is vain at this period to attempt giving a better description of the scenes of that night, for the men that were present in the affray could give no account of it next day. But, after a hard encounter and heavy loss, the English fought their way up to their friends before the ramparts, who had all the while been engaged in skirmishing with the foot of the western division, whom they had kept at bay, and thus preserved the entrance clear to themselves and brethren; but ere the rear had got over the half-moon before the bridge, it was heaped full of slain.

There were more of the Scots slain during the conflict of that hideous night than of the English; but by far the greater number of prisoners remained with the former, and several of them were men of note; but such care was taken to conceal rank and titles, after falling into the hands of their enemies, that they could only be guessed at. De Gray was slain, and Collingwood was wounded and taken; so that on taking a muster next day, the English found themselves losers by their heroic sally.

They had, however, taken one prize, of which, had they known the value, it would have proved a counterbalance for all their losses, and all the distinguished prisoners that formerly told against them. This was no other than the pretended page, Colin Roy, of whose sex and quality the reader has been formerly apprised, and whom they found concealed among some baggage in the Douglas' tent. Grievous was that page's plight when he found himself thrust into a vault below the castle of Roxburgh, among forty rude soldiers, many of them wounded, and others half-naked, and nothing given them to subsist on. Concealment of his true sex for any length of time was now impossible, and to divulge the secret certain ruin to himself and the cause of Douglas.

Next day he pleaded hard for an audience of Musgrave, on pretence of giving him some information that deeply concerned himself; and he pleaded with such eloquence that the guards listened to him, and informed the commander, who ordered the stripling to be brought before him. The next day following was that appointed for the execution of Sir Richard Musgrave. Colin informed the governor that, if he would give him his liberty, he would procure a reprieve for his brother, at least until the day of the Conception, during which period something might occur that would save the life of so brave a youth; that he was the only man on earth who had the power to alter the purpose of Douglas in that instance; and that he would answer with his head for the success – only the charm required immediate application.

Musgrave said it was a coward's trick to preserve his own life – for how could he answer to him for his success when he was at liberty? But that no chance might be lost for saving his brother's life, he would cause him to be conducted to Douglas under a strong guard, allow him what time he required to proffer his suit, and have him brought back to prison till the day of the Conception was over, and if he succeeded he should then have his

liberty. This was not exactly what Colin wanted: However, he was obliged to accept of the terms, and proceeded to the gate under a guard of ten men. The Scots officer of the advanced guard refused to let any Englishman pass, but answered with his honour to conduct the stripling in safety to his commander, and in two hours return him back to the English at the draw-bridge. No more was required; and he was conducted accordingly to the door of Douglas' tent, which, as he desired, he was suffered to enter, the men keeping guard at the door.

In the confusion of that morning, Douglas never had missed the page, nor knew he that he was taken prisoner; and when the boy entered from his own little apartment, he judged him to be in attendance as usual. He had a bundle below his arm tied up in a lady's scarf, and a look that manifested great hurry and alarm. The Douglas, who was busily engaged with two knights, could not help noting his appearance, at which he smiled.

'My lord,' said the boy, 'I have an engagement of great importance to-day, and the time is at hand. I cannot get out at the door by reason of the crowd, who must not see this. Will it please you to let me pass by your own private door into the city?'

Douglas cursed him for a troublesome imp, and forthwith opened the door into the concealed way; and as all who came from the door passed unquestioned, the page quickly vanished in the suburbs of the city.

The officer and his guard waited and waited until the time was on the point of expiring, and at last grew quite impatient, wondering what the boy could be doing so long with the commander. But at length, to their mortal astonishment, they beheld the stripling coming swaggering up from the high street of the city behind them, putting a number of new and ridiculous airs in practice, and quite unlike one going to be delivered up to enemies to be thrown into a dungeon, or perhaps hanged like a dog in a day or two.

The officer knew nothing of the concealed door and passage, and was lost in amazement how the page should have escaped from them all without being visible; but he wondered still more how the elf, being once at liberty, should have thought of coming strutting back to deliver himself up again.

'Where the devil have you been, master, an it be your will?' said the officer.

'Eh? What d'ye say, mun?' said the unaccountable puppy. 'What do I say mun!' replied the officer, quite unable to account either for the behaviour of

the prisoner or his address; ‘I say I trow ye hae seen sic a man as Michael Scott some time in your days? Ye hae gi’en me the glaiks aince by turning invisible; but be ye deil, be ye fairy, I sal secure ye now. Ye hae nearly gart me brik my pledge o’ honour, whilk I wadna hae done for ten sic necks as yours.’

‘Your pledge o’ honour? What’s that, mun? Is that your bit sword? Stand back out o’ my gate.’

‘Shakel my knackers,’ said the officer laughing, ‘if I do not crack thy fool’s pate! What does the green-kail-worm mean? You, sir, I suppose are presuming to transact a character? You are playing a part in order to get off, but your silly stratagem will fail you. Pray, my young master, what character do you at present appear in?’

‘Character me no characters!’ said the page – ‘it is not with you that I transact – nor such as you! Do not you see who I am, and what commission I bear? Bide a great way back out o’ my gate an ye please; and show me where I am to deliver this.’

‘And who is that bald epistle for, master Quipes? Please to open your sweet mouth, and read me the inscription.’

‘Do you not see, saucy axe-man? Cannot you spell it? “To James, Earl of Douglas and Mar, with greeting, These.” Herald me to your commander, nadkin; but keep your distance – due proportioned distance, if you please.’

‘No, no, my little crab cherry; you cheated me by escaping from the tent invisible before, but shall not do it again. We’ll get your message done for you; your time is expired, and some more to boot, I fear; come along with us.’ – And forthwith one of their number waited on the chief with the letter, while the rest hauled off the unfortunate page, and delivered him back to the English.

CHAPTER 9

His doublet was sae trim and neat,
  Wi' reid goud to the chin,
Ye wad hae sworn, had ye been there,
  That a maiden stood within.
The tears they trickled to his chin,
  And fell down on his knee;
O had he wist before he kissed,
  That the boy was a fair ladye.

Song of May Marley

Who's she, this dame that comes in such a guise,
Such face of import, and unwonted speech?
Tell me, Cornaro. For methinks I see
Some traits of hell about her.

Trag. of the Prioress

In this perilous situation were placed the two most beautiful ladies of England and Scotland, at the close of that memorable year; and in this situation stood the two chiefs with relation to those they valued dearest in life; the one quite unconscious of the misery that awaited him, but the other prepared to stand the severest of trials. Success had for some time past made a show of favouring the Scots, but she had not yet declared herself, and matters with them soon began to look worse. As a commencement of their misfortunes, on that very night the battle took place, the English received a supply of thirty horse-loads of provisions, with assurances that Sir Thomas Musgrave, the governor of Berwick, was setting out with a strong army to their succour.

The supply was received in this way. There was a bridge over the Teviot, which communicated only with the castle, the north end of it being within the draw-bridge, and that bridge the English kept possession of all the time of the seige. It being of no avail to the Scots, they contented themselves by keeping a guard at the convent of Maisondieu, to prevent any

communication between the fortress and the Border. But the English barons to the eastward, whose castles lay contiguous to the Tweed, taking advantage of the great flood, came with a strong body of men, and attacking this post by surprise, they beat them, and, chasing them a considerable way up the river, got the convoy along the bridge into the castle.

This temporary relief raised the spirits of the English, or rather cheered their prospects, for higher in inveterate opposition their spirits could not be raised. On the day following, likewise, a flying party of Sir Thomas Musgrave's horse made their appearance on the height above Hume castle, and blew their horns, and tossed their banners abroad on the wind, that the besieged might see them, and understand that their friends were astir to make a diversion in their favour.

On the same day a new gibbet was erected on the top of the Bush law, with a shifting wooden battery, to protect the executioners; and all within the castle feared that the stern and unyielding Douglas was going to put his threat respecting the life of Sir Richard Musgrave into execution. Therefore, to prevent their captain from seeing the scene, and, if possible, his mind from recurring to it, they contrived to get a council of war called, at which they intentionally argued and contended about matters of importance, in order to detain him until the sufferings of his brother were past.

The Bush-law, on which the Scots had a strong fortification, rises abruptly over against the western tower of the castle of Roxburgh; they were separated only by the moat, and, though at a great height, were so near each other, that men could with ease converse across, and see distinctly what was done. On the top of this battery was the new gibbet erected, the more to gall the English by witnessing the death of their friends.

At noon, the Scots, to the number of two hundred, came in procession up from the city, with their prisoner dressed in his knightly robes; and, as they went by, they flouted the English that looked on from the walls – but the latter answered them not, either good or bad. By a circular rout to the westward they reached the height, where they exposed the prisoner to the view of the garrison on a semicircular platform, for a few minutes, until a herald made proclamation, that unless the keys of the castle were instantly delivered at the draw-bridge, the life of the noble prisoner was forfeited, and the sentence would momently be put in execution; and then he concluded by calling, in a louder voice, 'Answer, Yes or no – once – twice.'

He paused for the space of twenty seconds, and then repeated slowly, and apparently with reluctance, ‘Once – twice – *thrice*,’ – and the platform folding down, the victim was launched into eternity.

The English returned no answer to the herald, as no command or order had been given. In moody silence they stood till they witnessed the fatal catastrophe, and then a loud groan, or rather growl of abhorrence and vengeance, burst from the troops on the wall, which was answered by the exulting shouts of the Scots. At that fatal moment Musgrave stepped on the battlement, to witness the last dying throes of his loved brother. By some casualty, the day of the week and month happening to be mentioned in the council hall, in the midst of his confused and abstracted ideas, that brought to his remembrance the fate with which his brother had been threatened. Still he had hopes that it would have been postponed; for, as a drowning man will catch violently at floating stubble, so had he trusted to the page’s mediation. He had examined the stripling on his return to the dungeon, but the imp proved froward and incommunicative, attaching to himself an importance of which the captain could not perceive the propriety; yet, though he had nothing to depend on the tender mercies of Douglas, as indeed he had no right, he nevertheless trusted to his policy for the saving of his brother alive; knowing that, in his life, he held a bond round his heart which it was not his interest to snap.

As he left the hall of council, which was in the great western tower, and in the immediate vicinity of the scene then transacting, the murmurs of the one host and the shouts of the other drew him to the battlement, whence his eye momently embraced the heart-rending cause of the tumult. He started, and contracted every muscle of his whole frame, shrinking downward, and looking madly on each hand of him. He seemed in act to make a spring over the wall; and the soldiers around him perceiving this, and haply misjudging the intent of his motion, seized on him to restrain him by main force. But scarecly did he seem to feel that he was held; he stretched out his hands toward his brother, and uttered a loud cry of furious despair, and then in a softer tone cried, ‘Oh! my brother! my brother! – So you would not warn me, you dog? – Nor you? – Nor you? – No, you are all combined against me. That was a sight to gratify you, was it not? My curse on you, and all that have combined against the life of that matchless youth!’ and with that

he struggled to shake them from him. ‘My lord! my lord!’ was all that the soldiers uttered, as they restrained him.

At that instant Clavering rushed on the battlement. ‘Unhand the captain!’ cried he: ‘Dare you, for the lives that are not your own, presume to lay violent restraint on him, and that in the full view of your enemies?’

‘I will have vengeance, Clavering!’ cried Musgrave – ‘ample and uncontrolled vengeance! Where is the deceitful and impertinent stripling that promised so solemnly to gain a reprieve for my brother, and proffered the forfeit of his life if he failed?’

‘In the dungeon, my lord, fast and secure.’

‘He is a favourite parasite of the Douglas; bring him forth that I may see vengeance executed on him the first of them all. I will hang every Scot in our custody; but go and bring him the first. It is a base deceitful cub, and shall dangle opposite to that noble and now lifeless form. It is a poor revenge indeed – but I will sacrifice every Scot of them. Why don’t you go and bring the gilded moth, you kennel knaves? Know you to whom you thus scruple obedience?’

Clavering was silent, and the soldiers durst not disobey, though they obeyed with reluctance, knowing the advantages that the Scots possessed over them, both in the numbers and rank of their prisoners. They went into the vaults, and, without ceremony or intimation of their intent, lifted the gaudy page in their arms, and carried him to the battlement of the western tower, from whence, sans farther ceremony, he was suspended from a beam’s end.

Douglas could not believe the testimony of his own senses when he saw what had occurred. Till that moment he never knew that his page was a prisoner. Indeed, how could he conceive he was, when he had seen him in his tent the day after the night engagement? His grief was of a cutting and sharp kind, but went not to the heart; for though the boy had maintained a sort of influence over him, even more than he could account to himself for, yet still he was teasing and impertinent, and it was not the sort of influence he desired.

‘I wish it been our blessed Lady’s will to have averted this,’ said he to himself; ‘But the mischances of war often light upon those least concerned in the event. Poor Colin! thy beauty, playfulness, and flippancy of speech

deserved a better guerdon. How shall I account to my royal mistress for the cruel fate of her favourite?'

With all this partial regret, Douglas felt that, by the loss of this officious page of the princess, he would be freed from the controul of petticoat-government. He perceived that the princess lived in concealment somewhere in the neighbourhood – kept an eye over all his actions and movements – and, by this her agent, checked or upbraided him according to her whimsical inexperience. Douglas was ambitious of having the beautiful princess for his spouse – of being son-in-law to his sovereign – and the first man in the realm; but he liked not to have his counsels impeded, or his arms checked, by a froward and romantic girl, however high her lineage or her endowments might soar. So that, upon the whole, though he regretted the death of Colin Roy MacAlpin, he felt like one released from a slight bondage. Alas, noble chief! little didst thou know of the pang that was awaiting thee!

It will be recollected that, when the Lady Margaret first arrived in the camp in the character of Colin her own page, she lodged her maid in the city of Roxburgh, disguised likewise as a boy. With her she communicated every day, and contrived to forward such letters to the Court as satisfied her royal mother with regard to the motives of her absence – though these letters were, like many others of the sex, any thing but the direct truth. The king was at this period living in retirement at his castle of Logie in Athol, on pretence of ill health.

The name of the maiden of honour thus disguised was Mary Kirkmichael, the daughter of a knight in the shire of Fife. She was a lady of great beauty, and elegant address – shrewd, sly, and enterprising.

Two days after the rueful catastrophe above related, word was brought to Douglas, while engaged in his pavilion, that a lady at the door begged earnestly to see him. 'Some petitioner for the life of a prisoner,' said he: 'What other lady can have business with me? Tell her I have neither leisure nor inclination at present to listen to the complaints and petitions of women.'

'I have told her so already,' said the knight in waiting; 'but she refuses to go away till she speak with you in private; and says that she has something to communicate that deeply concerns your welfare. She is veiled; but seems a beautiful, accomplished, and courtly dame.'

At these words the Douglas started to his feet. He had no doubt that it was the princess, emerged from her concealment in the priory or convent, and come to make inquiries after her favourite, and perhaps establish some other mode of communication with himself. He laid his account with complaints and upbraidings, and, upon the whole, boded no great good from this domiciliary visit. However, he determined to receive his royal mistress with some appearance of form; and, in a few seconds, at a given word, squires, yeomen, and grooms, to the amount of seventy, were arranged in due order, everyone in his proper place; and up a lane formed of these was the lady conducted to the captain, who received her standing and uncovered; but, after exchanging courtesies with her, and perceiving that it was not the princess, jealous of his dignity, he put on his plumed bonnet, and waited with stately mien the development of her rank and errand.

It was Mary Kirkmichael.

'My noble lord,' said she. 'I have a word for your private ear, and deeply doth it concern you and all this realm.'

Douglas beckoned to his friends and attendants, who withdrew and left him alone with the dame, who began thus with great earnestness of manner: 'My lord of Douglas, I have but one question to ask, and, if satisfied with the answer, will not detain you a moment. What is become of the page Colin that attended your hand of late?' Douglas hesitated, deeming the lady to be some agent of the princess Margaret's. 'Where is he?' continued she, raising her voice, and advancing a step nearer to the captain. 'Tell me, as you would wish your soul to thrive. Is he well? Is he safe?'

'He is sped on a long journey, lady, and you may not expect to meet him again for a season.'

'Sped on a long journey! Not see him again for a season! What does this answer mean? Captain, on that youth's well-being hang the safety, the nobility, and the honour of your house. Say but to me he is well, and not exposed to any danger in the message on which he is gone.'

'Of his well-being I have no doubt; and the message on which he is gone is a safe one. He is under protection from all danger, commotion, or strife.'

'It is well you can say so, else wo would have fallen to your lot, to mine, and to that of our nation.'

'I know he was a page of court, and in the confidence of my sovereign and adored Lady Margaret. But how could any misfortune attending a page

prove of such overwhelming import?'

'*Was* a page of court, my lord? What do you infer by that *was*? Pray what is he now? I entreat of you to be more explicit.'

'The plain truth of the matter is shortly this: The boy fell into the hands of our enemies that night of the late fierce engagement.'

At this the lady uttered a scream; and Douglas, dreading she would fall into hysterics, stretched out his arms to support her. 'I pity you, gentle maiden,' said he, 'for I perceive you two have been lovers.'

She withdrew herself, shunning his proffered support, and, looking him wildly in the face, said in a passionate voice, 'In the hands of the English? O Douglas, haste to redeem him! Give up all the prisoners you have for that page's ransom; and if these will not suffice, give up all the lands of Douglas and Mar; and if all these are still judged inadequate, give up yourself. But, by your fealty, your honour, your nobility, I charge you, and, in the name of the Blessed Virgin, I conjure you to lose no time in redeeming that youth.'

Douglas could scarcely contain his gravity at this rhapsody, weening it the frantic remonstrance of a love-sick maid; but she, perceiving the bent and tenor of his disposition, held up her hand as a check to his ill-timed levity. 'Unhappy chief!' exclaimed she, 'Little art thou aware what a gulf of misery and despair thou art suspended over, and that by a single thread within reach of the flame, and liable every moment to snap, and hurl thee into inevitable ruin. Know, and to thyself alone be it known, that that page was no other than the princess of Scotland herself; who, impelled by romantic affection, came in that disguise to attend thee in all thy perils, undertaken for her sake. It was she herself who seized her rival, and placed her in your hands, thus giving you an advantage which force could not bestow. And from time to time has she laid such injunctions on you, written and delivered by her own hand, as she judged conducive to your honour or advantage. If you suffer that inestimable lady to lye in durance, or one hair of her head to fall to the ground, after so many marks of affection and concern for you, you are unworthy of lady's esteem, of the titles you bear, or the honour of knighthood.'

When the lady first came out with the fatal secret, and mentioned the princess's name, Douglas strode hastily across the floor of the pavilion, as if he would have run out at the door, or rather fallen against it; but the motion was involuntary; he stopped short, and again turned round to the speaker,

gazing on her as if only half comprehending what she said. The truth of the assertion opened to him by degrees; and, it may well be supposed, the intelligence acted upon his mind and frame like a shock of electricity. He would fain have disbelieved it, had he been able to lay hold of a plausible pretext to doubt it; but every recollected circumstance coincided in the establishment of the unwelcome fact. All that he could say to the lady, as he stood like a statue gazing her in the face, was, 'Who art thou?'

'I am Mary Kirkmichael of Balmedie,' said she, 'and I came with the princess, disguised as her attendant. I am her friend and confidant, and we held communication every day, till of late that my dear mistress discontinued her visits. O captain, tell me if it is in your power to save her!'

Douglas flung himself on a form in the corner of the tent, and hid his face with his hand, and at the same time groaned as if every throb would have burst his heart's casement. He had seen his royal, his affectionate, and adored mistress swung from the enemy's battlements, without one effort to save her, and without a tear wetting his cheek; and his agony of mind became so extreme that he paid no more regard to the lady, who was still standing over him, adding the bitterest censure to lamentation. Yet he told her not of her mistress's melancholy fate – he could not tell her; but the ejaculatory words that he uttered from time to time too plainly informed Mary Kirkmichael that the life of her royal mistress was either in jeopardy or irretrievably lost.

The Douglas saw the lady no more, nor regarded her. He rushed from the tent, and gave such orders as quite confounded his warriors, one part being quite incompatible with another; and, in the confusion, Mary glided quietly away from the scene without farther notice. All the motions of Douglas, for two days subsequent to this piece of information, were like those of a drunken man; he was enraged without cause, and acted without consistency; but the only point towards which all these jarring and discordant passions constantly turned was revenge on the English – deadly and insatiable revenge. When he looked towards the ramparts of the castle, his dark eye would change its colour, and sink deeper under his brow, while his brown cheeks would appear as if furrowed across, and his teeth ground and jarred against one another. His counsels, however, were not, at this time, of a nature suited to accomplish any thing material against his rivals. He

meditated the most deadly retaliation, but was prevented before he could put it in practice.

On the following evening, when the disturbance of his mind had somewhat subsided, and appeared to be settling into a sullen depression of spirit, or rather a softened melancholy, he was accosted by a monk, who had craved and obtained admittance – for a deference to all that these people said or did was a leading feature of that age. Douglas scarcely regarded him on his first entrance, and to his address only deigned to answer by a slight motion of his head; for the monk's whole appearance augured little beyond contempt. He was of a diminutive stature, had a slight, starved make, and a weak treble voice. His conversation, nevertheless, proved of that sort that soon drew the attention of the chief.

'May the blessed Virgin, the mother of God, bless and shield you, captain!'

'Humph!' returned the Douglas, nodding his head.

'May Saint Withold be your helmet and buckler in the day of battle—'

'Amen!' said the Douglas, interrupting him, and taking a searching look of the tiny being that spoke, as if there were something in the tones of his voice that struck him with emotion.

'– And withhold your weapon from the blood of the good,' added the monk, 'from the breast of the professor of our holy religion, and dispose your heart to peace and amity, that the land may have rest, and the humble servants of the Cross protection. Why don't you say "Amen" to this, knight? Is your profession of Christianity a mere form? and are the blessed tenets which it enjoins, strangers to thy turbulent bosom?'

'Humph!' said Douglas: 'With reverence be it spoken, monk, but you holy brethren have got a way of chattering about things that you do not understand. Adhere to your books and your beads. I am a soldier, and must stick by my profession, bearing arms for my king and country.'

'I am a soldier too,' rejoined the monk, 'and bear arms and suffer in a better cause. But enough of this. I have a strange message for you, captain. You must know that, a few weeks ago, a beautiful youth came to our monastery seeking supply of writing materials, which he could not otherwise procure. He was a kind and ingenious youth. I supplied him, for I loved him; and I have since seen him sundry times in my cell. But last night, as I was sitting alone, a little before midnight – I am afraid you will

not believe me, captain, for the matter of my message is so strange – I had gone over my breviary, and was sitting with the cross pressed to my lips, when behold the youth entered. I arose to receive him; but he beckoned me to keep away from his person, and glided backward. I then recollected that he must be a spirit, else he could not have got in; and, though I do not recollect all that he said, the purport of his message was to the following effect:

‘“Benjamin,” said he, “arise and go to the captain of the Scottish army, whom you will find in great perplexity of mind, and meditating schemes of cruelty and retaliation, which would be disgraceful to himself and to his country. But let him beware; for there be some at his hand that he does not see; and if he dare in the slightest instance disobey the injunctions which you shall from time to time lay on him, his sight shall be withered by a visitant from another world, whose face he shall too well recognize ever again to find rest under a consciousness of her presence. Monk Benjamin, I was not what I seemed. A few days ago I was a lady in the prime of youth and hope. I loved that captain, and was betrothed to him. For his sake I ventured my life, and lost it without a single effort on his part to save me. But his fate is in my hand, and I will use the power. It is given to me to control or further his efforts as I see meet – to turn his sword in the day of battle – or to redouble the strength of his and his warriors’ arms. My behests shall be made known to him; and if he would avoid distraction of mind, as well as utter ruin, let him tremble to disobey. In the first place, then, you will find him pondering on a scheme for the recovery of my lifeless body – a scheme of madness which cannot and may not succeed; therefore, charge him from me to desist. You will find him farther preparing an embassy to my father and mother to inform them of the circumstances of my death, and that not in the words of truth. But let him take care to keep that a secret, as he would take care of his life and honour, for on that depends his ultimate success. Tell him farther, from me, to revenge my death, but not on the helpless beings that are already in his power; to pursue with steady aim his primary object – and his reward shall be greater than he can conceive.”

‘Strange as this story may appear, captain, it is strictly according to truth. You yourself may judge whether it was a true or lying spirit that spoke to me.’

‘Are you not some demon or spirit yourself,’ said the Douglas, ‘who know such things as these? Tell me, are you a thing of flesh and blood, that you can thus tell me the thoughts and purposes of my heart?’

‘I am a being such as yourself,’ said the monk – ‘a poor brother of the Cistertian order, and of the cloister adjoining to this; and I only speak what I was enjoined to speak, without knowing whether it is true or false. I was threatened with trouble and dismay if I declined the commission; and I advise you, captain, for your own peace of mind, to attend to this warning.’

Douglas promised that he would, at least for a time; and the monk, taking his leave, left the earl in the utmost consternation. The monk’s tale was so simple and unmasked, there was no doubting the truth of it – for without such a communication it was impossible he could have known the things he uttered; and the assurance that a disembodied being should have such a power over him, though it somewhat staggered the Douglas’ faith, created an unwonted sensation within his breast – a sensation of wonder and awe; for none of that age were exempt from the sway of an overpowering superstition.

CHAPTER 10

What a brave group we have! That fellow there,
He with the cushion, would outprate the cricket;
The babble of the brook is not more constant,
Or syllabled with such monotony,
Than the eternal tingle of his tongue.

Cor. I'll bid him silence, master;
Or do him so, which likes you.

The Prioress

We must now leave the two commanders in plights more dismal than ever commanders were before, and return to our warden, the bold baron of Mountcomyn, whose feats form a more pleasant and diverting subject. His warfare all this while was of a predatory nature – for that his warriors were peculiarly fitted, and at this time they did not fail to avail themselves well of the troubles on the border, and the prevailing power of the Scots alongst its line. The warden pretended still to be acting in concert with Douglas, but his operations were all according to the purposes of his own heart. He cared nothing for the success or the aggrandisement of Douglas; but he had a particular eye to the advancement of his own house, and the honour of his kinsmen. It was therefore a matter of daily consulation with him and his friends, how they should act in conformity with this ruling principle. The probability was against Douglas, that he would ultimately fail in his undertaking, and be stripped of all his dominions. Viewing the matter in that light, it was high time for the Redhough to be providing for himself. On the other hand, should Douglas succeed in his enterprize, and become the king's son-in-law, there was no other way by which the warden could hold his own, save by a certain species of subordination, a submission in effect, though not by acknowledgment. Such matters were perfectly understood by the chiefs in these times, and all who proved refractory were taught in

silence to feel the grounds on which they stood. This was, therefore, a most critical period for Sir Ringan. The future advancement of his house depended on every turn of his hand. During all the former part of the siege he had conducted himself with an eye to Douglas' failure, to which he was partly incited by the prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer, and those of his kinsman, Master Michael Scott of Oakwood, whom he believed the most powerful wizard, and the greatest prophet, that ever had arisen since the Rhymer's days.

But, on the return of Charlie of Yardbire and Dan Chisholm from the beleaguering army, the warden got the extraordinary intelligence, that the Lady Jane Howard had fallen into the hands of the Douglas, as well as Musgrave's only brother. These things changed Sir Ringan's prospects of the future in a very material degree, and he pondered on changing his mode of operations. Before doing so, however, he called a council of his kinsmen, and brought the matter again before them. Most of them counselled the continuance of the predatory warfare in which they had been engaged; it had served to enrich them, and had proved, as they reasoned, of more service to the Douglas than if they had joined his host. That it proved of more service to himself and his kinsmen than if they had joined the host, the warden was well aware; but he was not satisfied that the Douglas viewed their mountain warfare as of great consequence to him; and he farther knew, that services were always repaid, not according to the toil and exertion undergone, but according as they were estimated, while that estimation was ever and anon modelled by the apparent motives of the performer.

After much slow and inanimate reasoning on the matter, Sir Ringan chanced, after a minute's deep thought, to say, 'What would I not give to know the events that are to happen at Roxburgh between this time and the end of the Christmas holidays?'

'Auld Michael Scott will ken brawly,' said Charlie of Yardbire.

'Then, what for shoudna we ken too?' said the knight.

'Aye, what for shoudna we ken too?' said Dickie o' Dryhope.

'They might get a kittle cast that meddled wi' him, an' nae the wiser after a',' said Robert of Howpasley.

'When he was at pains to come a' the way to the castle of Mountcomyn,' said Simon Longspeare, 'a matter o' five Scots miles ower the moor, to

warn our captain, the warden, how to row his bowls, he surely winna refuse to tell him what's to be the final issue o' this daft contest.'

'Ane wad think he wadna spare a cantrip or twa,' said Sir Ringan; 'him that has spirits at his ca', an' canna get them hadden i' wark. It wad be an easy matter for him; an' blood's aye thicker than water.'

'Ay, that's a true tale,' said Dickie o' Dryhope; 'It wad be an easy matter for him, we a' ken that; an' blood's aye thicker than water!'

'If I were to gang wi' a gallant retinue,' said Sir Ringan, 'he surely wadna refuse to gie me some answer.'

'He wad refuse the king o' France,' said Robert of Howpasley, 'if he warna i' the key for human conversation, an' maybe gar his familiar spirits carry you away, and thraw ye into the sea, or set you down i' some faraway land, for a piece o' employment to them, and amusement to himsel'. He has served mony ane that gate afore now.'

'Od I'll defy him,' said muckle Charlie of Yardbire. 'If my master, the warden, likes to tak me wi' him for his elbowman, I'll answer for him against a' the monkey spirits that auld Michael has.'

'Spoke like yourself, honest Charlie!' said the baron; 'and if it is judged meet by my friends that I should go, you shall be one that shall attend me. Certes, it would be of incalculable benefit to me, for all your sakes, to know even by a small hint what is to be the upshot of this business – But should I be taken away or detained—'

'Ay, should he be taken away or detained, gentlemen: think of that, gentlemen,' said Dickie o' Dryhope.

'I approve highly of the mission,' said Simon Longspeare; 'for I believe there is nothing too hard for that old wizard to do, and no event so closely sealed up in futurity, but that he can calculate with a good deal of certainty on the issue. I see that our all depends on our knowledge of the event; but I disapprove of our chief attending on the wizard in person – for in his absence who is to be our commander? And, should any sudden rising of our foes take place, of which we are every hour uncertain, we may lose more by the want of him one hour than we could ever regain.'

'Ay, think of that, gentlemen,' said Dickie: 'My cousin Longspeare speaks good sense. What could we do wanting Sir Ringan? We're all children to him, and little better without him.'

‘And old children are the worst of all children,’ said the warden; ‘I would rather be deaved with the teething yammer than the toothless chatter. Prithee, peace, and let us hear out our cousin Simon’s proposal.’

The circle of the gallant kinsmen did not like ill to hear this snub on old Dickie. They could not account for the chief’s partiality to him; and they were even afraid that, being the oldest man, he should be nominated to the command in the knight’s absence. It was however noted by all, that Dickie was not half so great a man in field or foray as he was at board in the castle of Mountcomyn. Only a very few men of experience discerned the bottom of this. The truth was, that Sir Ringan did not care a doit either for Dickie’s counsels or his arm, but he saw that his lady abhorred him, and therefore he would not yield to cast him off. His lady was of a high spirit and proud unyielding temper, and the knight could not stand his own with her at all times and seasons; but before his kinsmen warriors he was particularly jealous of his dignity, and would not yield to the encroachment on it of a single item. It was by this kind of elemental opposition, if it may be so termed, that Dickie maintained his consequence at the warden’s castle. In the field he was nothing more than a foolish vain old kinsman.

‘I propose,’ said Longspeare, ‘that we send a deputation of our *notable men* to the warlock, of whom we have some of the first that perhaps ever the world produced. As a bard, or minstrel, we can send Colley Carol, a man that is fit to charm the spirits out of the heart of the earth, or the bowels of the cloud, without the aid of old Michael. As a man of crabbed wit and endless absurdity, we can send the Deil’s Tam: As a true natural and moral philosopher, the Laird o’ the Peatstacknowe: As one versed in all the mysteries of religion, and many mysteries beside, or some tell lies, we can send the gospel friar. All these are men of spirit, and can handle the sword and the bow either less or more. And as a man of unequalled strength and courage, and a guard and captain over all the rest, we can send Charlie o’ Yardbire – and I will defy all the kingdoms of Europe to send out sic another quorum either to emperor, Turk, wizard, or the devil himself.’

Everyone applauded Simon Longspeare’s motion, and declared the deputation worthy of being sent out, if it were for nothing but its own unrivalled excellence. Never, they said, since the mind of man was framed, was there such a combination of rare talent in so small a circle. There was none of those nominated for the mission present excepting muckle Charlie

Scott. Charlie scratched his head, and said: – ‘Gude faith, callans, I hae a queer bike to gang wi! he-he-he! I fear we’ll get mae to laugh at us than gie us ought: The Deil’s Tam an’ the metre poet! the fat gospel friar, and the laird o’ the Peatstacknowe! I never gaed out on sic a foray as this afore, an’ little do I wot how we’ll come on. He-he-he! A wheen queer chaps, faith!’

The jocund kinsmen then shouted to Gibby Jordan of the Peatstacknowe to come into the circle, that they might hear what he had to say about going on this celebrated embassy. This gentleman’s name had erst been Gordon: By some mistake, either in spelling, or falling into some foul tub by night, for some grounded it both ways, it had been changed on him to Jordan, and, as he had no resource, he was obliged to admit it as legitimate. He was a man of education, and could read, write, and cast up accounts. But his figure, features, and the nasal twine with which he pronounced every word that he spoke, rendered his discourse irresistibly ludicrous. Every one was so ready to give Jordan the information, that he was chosen as one to go on a deputation to Master Michael Scott the warlock, that the laird for a long time could not get a word said; but stood and looked about him, turning always round his long nose to the speaker that was loudest, or him that was poking him most forcibly to obtain attention.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Gibby Jordan, ‘you mind me of a story that I have heard about a paddock that was lying on the plowed land, an’ by comes the harrows, an’ they gangs out ower the tap o’ the poor paddock, an’ every tooth gae her a tite an’ a turn ower. “What’s the matter wi’ you the day, Mrs Paddock?” says the goodman: “Naething ava, but rather ower mony masters this morning,” quo’ the paddock; “I wish I were safe i’ my hole again, an’ let them ring on.” Sae master’s, I’ll tak the paddock’s hint, an’ wish ye a’ a good morning.’

There was no such escape for the honest laird; they surrounded him, and insisted on hearing his sentiments at full length, teasing him till he began to lose his temper, a thing in which they delighted, for the more mischief the better sport for these wild border moss-troopers. But muckle Charlie perceiving this, came up to his side. ‘Callants, I’m appointit Gibby’s guard,’ said he, ‘an’ his guard I’ll be. What the deil has ony o’ you to say to him?’

‘Only to hear what he thinks o’ the journey,’ was repeated on all sides.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Gibby, ‘the hale affair brings me a-mind of a story that I hae heard about a wife that had a batch o’ chickens. But then, ye maun

mind, gentlemen, she had a very great deal o' chickens, I daresay nae fewer than a hunner, for she had sax great cleckings; an' she was unco feared that the gled wad tak them away; sae she wales out a wheen o' the fattest an' the best, an' she sends them out to the cock, that he might herd an' tak care o' them. "The cock will fleg away the gleds," quo she, "an' gar them keep their distance, an' I'll get my braw birds a' saved." But by comes the greedy gled; an' when the cock saw him he croups an' he currs; an' blithe to keep his ain skin hale, he staps his head in a hole, an' the gled carried off the hale o' his bit charge. Weel, the gled, he fand them sae fat an' sae gusty, that he never linned till he had taen away every chicken that the wife had.'

'Where is the moral of that story, laird?' cried they: 'We see no coincidence.'

'Because ye're blind,' said Jordan: 'Dinna ye see that Michael's the cock, the deil's the gled, an' ye're the birds. He'll get us first; an' he'll find out that we're sic a wheen rare chaps, that he'll never blin' till he hae ye ilk ane, an' that will be the end o' your daft embassy.'

All the rest of the nominated members being sent for expressly from their different posts, they soon arrived, but they seemed every one to be adverse to the mission, except Colley the minstrel, who was elevated with the idea of being introduced to the celebrated Master, anticipating something highly romantic, and precisely in his own way. As for Thomas Craik, better known by the singular appellation of the Deil's Tam, he cared not much about any thing, provided he got plenty of drink, mischief, and breaking of heads.

They got all that day to prepare themselves, while Sir Ringan and his friends were considering what they should send as a present to the illustrious necromancer. They weened he despised riches, believing that he could turn small slates to gold by touching them; and, after much consultation, it was resolved to send him a captive maiden and boy, as they had two in the camp, of exquisite loveliness. The maid was the reputed daughter of Sir Anthony Hall, an inveterate enemy to the baron of Mountcomyn, who had burned his castles and plundered his lands; but the warden at length engaging with him hand to hand at the battle of Blaikhope, slew him, and having discomfited his army, he plundered and harried all that pertained to him, at which time he took this beautiful maiden prisoner, whom he treated kindly, and kept as an handmaiden. Her name was Delany; and so lovely was she become in person, and so amiable in her manners,

that several of the knight's kinsmen had asked her in marriage. These applications he had uniformly put off, on pretence of his friends degrading themselves by marrying a captive Englishwoman, a term that never sounded in a Scot's ear but with disgust. But, in fact, the warden did not choose that any of them should be so closely connected with an old respectable Northumberland family.

The boy was called Elias, and was the property of Jock o' Gilmanscleuch, having been taken by him in a night foray at Rothbury. When the warden applied to Jock for him, bidding him name his ransom, he answered, that if he wist 'Michael wad either mak a warlock o' him, or tak out his harigalds to be a sacrifice to the deil, he wadna gie him up for a' the lands o' Newburgh an' Birkendely.' Being pacified on these points as well as matters would bear, the two captives were dressed in elegant robes, and delivered to the embassy; Charlie was deputed their captain and leader; the rest were all to be equals, on the same footing, and to choose their own speakers.

After getting every direction regarding the purport of their mission, the caution and respect which they were to use toward the Master, and the questions they were to get answered, they departed; every one well mounted on an English horse, the friar on his own substantial mule, and such provision with them as they judged necessary. Carol, the bard, had a lyre and a flute. Gibby Jordan, ycleped of the Peatstacknowe, had nothing beside a rusty sword; the friar had an immense wallet below him, judged to be all implements of enchantment; the others had deer or goatskin wallets, stuffed with such things as they deemed necessary; and all of them wore arms, in case of meeting with any unknown interruption. Several of the gallant kinsmen shed tears on taking leave of Delany; who, contrary to what they all expected, seemed full of gaiety, and rather fond of the change than disheartened at it.

Well, away they rode; and, as soon as they were fairly out of sight of the army, every one began to attach himself to Delany more closely than his neighbour. The frair talked to her of penances, and the sins of youth, and the unlimited confidence due to the professors of religion. The bard chanted his wildest and most amorous ditties. Tam punned and quibbled on the words of the rest; and Gibby continued to narrate his long-winded parables, sometimes to one, sometimes to another, as he found them disposed to listen, and sometimes to none at all. As for Charlie, he contented himself

with laughing at them all alternately, and occasionally exchanging a word or sentiment with a valued friend of his.

‘Corby, what’s a’ this cocking o’ your lugs, an’ casting up o’ your head for, lad? Ye’re gaun the wrang road for a battle e’en now. An let you but see the sword an’ pree the spur, ye dog, ye wad carry your master to the deil: an’ troth, for ought he kens, ye may be carrying him born-head to his honour just now, ye unconscionable tike that ye are.’

Corby first laid back one ear and then the other, which Charlie took for a kind answer; and, patting his mane, he continued: ‘Na, na, Corby; I ken ye hae nae ill designs; but only ye ken ye like a little mischief, an’ a bit splutter now an’ than.’

‘That minds me o’ the story o’ Janet Sandilands an’ her son Jock,’ said Gibby Jordan the philosopher, ‘when he ruggit her hair, an’ raive her bussing. “That callant sude hae his hide threshed for lifting his hand to his mother,” said one: “Na, na,” quo Janet, “he maunna be threshed; Jock has nae ill in his mind, only he likes a tulzie.” She that wad hae a close cog sude keep a hale laiggen, Yardbire; for as the auld saying rins, “Lippen to a Corby, an’ he’ll pike out your een.”’

‘Shame fa’ me gin I see the drift o’ your philosophy, Peatstacknowe; but as I’m sure it is weel meant, it sanna be ill ta’en. Corby an’ me’s twa auld friends, an’ we hae a great deal to lippen to ane another. But I wish we had this unsonsy job owner, laird – we’re gaun on kittle ground.’

‘It minds me something o’ the fisher that ran away after the Willy-an’-the-wisp,’ said Jordan: ‘It’s a lang story, but it’s weel wordy the hearing.’

‘If it bea *very* lang story, we might as well crack about something else,’ said Charlie. ‘My heart’s unco muckle turned on this daft job o’ prying into the time that’s to come, an’ on what we’re to say to the warlock. Gude saif us, laird, wha’s to be the speaker? I wish that fleysome job maunna light on you? For you see, gin we set the deil’s Tam to address him, he’ll put him mad at the very first. The poet can bring out naething but rhames o’ high flown nonsense; an’ for mysel, I’m an unco plain matter-o’-fact man, an’ better at good straiks than good words. Sae that the matter maun lie atween you an’ the friar. What say you to this, Peatstacknowe?’

‘Gude troth, Yardbire, an the task light on either of us, it may weel bring me in mind o’ the laird o’ Glencarthon, when he stack i’ the midden at Saint Johnston, an’ tint himsel i’ the dark entry. The laird, you see, he comes to

the door of a sowhouse, an' calls out, "Good people within there, can you tell me the way to the Queen's hostlery?" "Oogh?" cried the auld sow. The laird repeated his question quite distinctly, which disturbing some o' the pigs, they came to the back o' the door an' fell a murmuring an' squeaking. "What do you say?" said the laird in his turn: "I'll thank you if you will not just speak so vehemently." The pigs went on. "Oh, I hear you speak Erse in this house," said the laird; "but no matter: thank you for your information, I will try to work my way." Now you see, Yardbire, like draws aye to like; an' for the friar, wi' his auld warld says, or me, to address the great Master, it wad be a reversing o' nature an' the very order of things. I hae nae hope o' our good success at a', an it warna for that bonnie Delany. If he's a man, an' no just an incarnate deil, he will be delightit wi' her.'

'I wish we had her safely at him, laird,' said Charlie; 'for, troth, do ye see, thae chaps hing about her, an' look at her as gin they wadna care to eat her.'

'She brings me amind o' a weelfaurd dink gimmer that wench,' said Jordan, 'that I aince saw gaun up Sowerhopeburn. There was a tichel o' wallidraggle tup hoggs rinning after her, an' plaguing her, till I was just grieved for the poor beast. At length down there comes a wheel-horned ram, the king o' the flock, an' he taks up his station by the side o' the bonny thing, an' than a' the young ranigalds slinkit away as their noses had been blooding. Then the bonny she thing got peace, for whenever ony o' the rascallions began to jee up his lug, an' draw near her, ae glent o' the auld fellow's ee stoppit him short. Now, Yardbire, I trow it is a shame to see a pretty maid jaumphed an' jurmummled in that gate: if you will just ride close up to the tae side o' her, I'll tak up the tither, an' we'll gar them keep a due distance. There's nane o' them dares shoulder you aside.'

'I doubt, laird, there is something selfish in that plan o' yours,' said Charlie; 'ye hae a hankering yonder yourself, but ye darena try to make your ain way without ye get me to back ye. Fight dog, fight bane, Peatstacknowe; gin I be to tulzie for a bonny may, I tulzie for my ain hand.'

'It wad be sae weel done to chap them back,' said Jordan: 'See to the metre poet how he's capering an' turning up his mou': Yon fat hypocrite, the warlock friar, is blinking out frae aneath his sanctified eebrees like a Barbary ape: An' there's the deil's Tam; od I think he'll hae his lang coulter nose stappit into her lug.'

‘Ride up, neighbour,’ quoth Charlie, ‘an’ tell them that face to face. I like nae yethering ahint backs. Ane may ward a blow at the breast, but a prod at the back’s no fair. A man wears neither ee nor armour there. Ride up, ride up, neighbour, gin you winna tell them a’ you have said, I’ll e’en tell them mysel.’

‘Yardbire, I hope ye’re no gaen gyte, to breed despite amang the warden’s ambassadors to the deil. Stop till I tell you a queer joke that’s come into my mind by your speaking about armour ahint. Last year, when the dalesmen were cried out in sic a hurry for the Durham raide, there was ane o’ Fairniehirst’s troopers got strong breastplates o’ steel made to defend his heart. There was ane Brogg Paterson in Hawick, a wag that I kenned weel, was employed to fit the harnessing to the clothes; and learning that the raide was to be early in the morning, an’ nae leisure for shifting, an’ seeing the trooper so intent on protecting his heart, instead o’ putting the steel plates in the inside o’ his doublet, Paterson fastened them in the seat of his trews. After passing the Tine, the Scots encamped within a half moon of an impervious brake, and sent out a party of foragers, among whom was this trooper Turnbull. The party were pursued by a body of English horse, and several of them slain; but Turnbull reaching the brake, plunged into it, horse and man. The horse stuck fast, and just as poor Turnbull was trying to extricate himself, by scrambling over the horse’s head, an Englishman came riding fiercely up, and struck him such a blow with his lance behind as would have spitted him to the neck – but hitting right on the steel plate, he made him fly heels-o’er-head over the brake, and into a place of safety. A comrade perceiving, came to assist him, and found Turnbull lying on the ground, repeating to himself these words with the utmost devotion: – “God bless Brogg Paterson in Hawick! God bless Brogg Paterson in Hawick!” “Wherefore that?” said the other. “Because,” said Turnbull, “he kend better where my heart lay than I did.”’

Charlie laughed so heartily at this jocular tale, that he did not expose Gibby Jordan of the Peatstacknowe to his associates at that time; but keeping behind with him he held him in conversation, though he saw that his teeth were watering to be near the fair Delany.

They came that night to a place called Trows, on the English side of the border, but adjoining to the very ridge of the fells. The name of the hind who sojourned there was Jock Robson. He had a good stock both of cows

and sheep, being so thoroughly a neutral man that both sides spared him, and both sides trusted him. He gave a night's grass to the driven cattle and sheep from each side, and a night's lodging to the drivers; and for this he exacted kane sheep, or a small cow, which none ever grudged him, because they found themselves so much at home in his house. He would assist either party in catching a prey, and either party in recovering it again, taking rewards from both; and, though both the English and the Scots knew of this, they never trusted him the less, for they knew that what he undertook he would fulfil, but no farther; out of your sight, out of your pay and out of your service with Jock Robson.

At this yeoman's habitation our notable embassy arrived at a late hour, for, though scarcely five o' clock afternoon, it was pitch dark. They called at the door, and out came Jock with a light. The first man that he beheld was the friar.

'Saint Mary's jerkin be about us!' cried Jock Robson, half in sport, half in earnest, 'and defend us from our auld black minny's delegates. What seeks Lucky Church amang the hills o' Cheviot, wi' her creeds an' her croons, her trumpery, an' her lang tythes o' sheep an' kye, wild deer, and weathershaker, barndoor an' blackhag fowls? Nought for Minny Church an' her bike here, Sir Monk – naething o' our ain breeding – a' comers an' gangers, like John Nisbet's fat sheep. Howsomever, honest bedesman, I speir ye the auld question,

"Come ye as friend, or come ye as fae?
For sic as ye bring, sic sal ye hae!"'

'As thy friends do we come, uncourteous hind,' said the monk; 'and ask only a little of thy bread, and thy strong drink, for the refreshment of our bodies, that are like the grass on the tops of thy mountains, fading ere it be full grown, and require as thou knowest a supply of earthly refreshment as these do the showers of heaven; and also we ask of thee beds whereon we may lie down and rest: and these things thou must not refuse, for we would not that thou shouldst be to us as the children of Amalek and Moab, and those of Mount Seir.'

'Ye speak like a rational man, Sir Monk; but wait till I tell ye the truth, that I lurde see the cross on the handle of sword or spear ony time afore that

hanging at the paunch of priest. There's mair honour an' generosity ahint the tane than the tither. But yet it shall never be said o' John Robson o' the Trows that he refused a friend quarters on a dark night. He kens ower weel that the king may come in the beggar's way. Gin ye be joking, he can stand a joke wi' ony man; but gin ye be really gaun to haud him as an Amalekite, he wad like to ken what that is, an' what lengths ye mean to gang.'

'Thinkest thou that we will come into thy house to take of thy spoil for a prey, and thy maid servants for bond-women, and also thy little ones?' said the friar.

'The deil be there then,' cried Jock Robson. 'I wadna grudge ye meal an' maut, but or ye lay a hand on ane o' my lasses, or kidnap away my bits o' bairnies frae me, ye sal gang owner my breast, an' that wi' a braid arrow through ilk ane o' you. Be at your shift, bauld priest, here's for ye.'

On saying so, he turned hastily about, and the friar that moment clapping the spurs to his mule, gallopped round the corner, leaving the rest to make good their quarters in the best way they could. The mention of the broad arrow made him think it was high time for him to change his ground.

'There rides gospel, guts an' a',' cried Tam Craik, laughing aloud.

The laugh was well known to Robson; for the warden's troopers had been so often there that year, that almost all of them were John Robson's personal acquaintances.

'What?' cried he, turning back his head, 'Isna that the Deil's Tam that I hear?'

'Ay, what for shoudna it, lad? an' how dare ye fright away our chaplain wi' your bows an' your braid arrows? Gin we had Jock's Marion, the sow-killer's wife o' Jeddart, at ye, wha wad be crousest then, trow ye?'

'Tam, it is weel kend your tongue is nae scandal; but dinna ye lippen ower muckle to your privilege; gin ye be come to quarter wi' me, dinna let me hear sic a hard jibe as that the night again. Come away, however, the warden's men are welcome, as weel they may be this year. Mony a fat mart they hae left i' my bire. I hope ye hae brought a bonny kane the night.'

'Ay, by my certie, lad, an' that we hae; here's nae less a kane than Jock's Marion hersel.'

'Ye scawed like bog-stalker! skrinkit, skraeshankit skebeld! dare ye to speak that gate to me at my ain door stane? I shall lend you a clout an ye

were the king's cousin, an' see if ye dare return the compliment. Wife, bring the buet an' my piked rung here.'

'Peace, in the king's name!' cried Charlie Scott.

'And in the name of St David!' cried the friar, returning to the charge on hearing Charlie's voice.

'And in my name!' cried Tam Craik; 'an' Gibby Jordan o' the Peatstacknowe's name; and the name o' Jock's Marion, the sow-sticker's wife o' Jeddart. I say unto thee, look here. Here is the kane will please a brave yeoman. Look if this be nae Marion hersel' – and with that he led Delany's palfrey up to the light.

Robson lifted his eyes and saw her, and was so much struck with her dazzling beauty, that he had not power to address even his beloved friend Charlie Scott, far less any other of his guests, but lifting the maiden down in his arms, he led her in to his dame, and said to one of his lads, 'Rin out wi' a light, callant, an' help the troopers to put up their horses.'

The horses were soon put up, for every one seemed more anxious than another to get first in to the cheek of Jock Robson's ingle, and have his seat placed next to that of Delany; but the poet being the most agile, and not the least amorous of the group, effected this greatly to his satisfaction.

CHAPTER 11

The youngest turned him in a path,
  And drew a buirdly brande,
And fifteen of the foremost slewe,
  Till back the lave couthe stande.

Then he spurred the grey unto the path,
  Till baith her sides they bledde;
'Now, grey, if thou carry nae me away
  My life it lies in wedde.'

Ballad of Auld Maitland

We must pass over a great part of the conversation that evening, in order to get forward to the more momentous part of the history of our embassy. Suffice it to say, that the poet was in high glory, and not only delivered himself in pure iambics, but sung several love ditties, and one song of a foray, that pleased Charlie Scott mightily. But Isaac, the curate, has only given a fragment of it, which runs thus:

If you will meet me on the Dirdam waste,
  Merry man mint to follow;
I'll start you the deer, and lead you the chace,
  With a whoop, and a whoo, and a hollo!
The deer that you'll see, has horns enow, &c.
Marked wi'red and merled wi' blue, &c.
And that deer he will not turn his tail
For the stoutest hinds that range the dale.
Come then, driver, in gear bedight;
Come bold yeoman, and squire, and knight;
The wind soughs loud on craig and heuch,
And the linn rowts loud in the Crookside cleuch;
Nor tramp of steed, nor jingle of spear,

Will ever be heard by the southern deer:
The streamer is out, and the moon away,
And the morning starn will rise or day.
Then mount to the stirrup, and scour the fell,
  Merry man mint to follow;
And over the muir, and the dean, and the dell,
  With a whoop, and a whoo, and a hollo!

‘Thy words and thy song, young man,’ said the friar, ‘are like sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; if laid in the balance, they are lighter than vanity.’

‘Yours will not prove so,’ said the poet, ‘provided you are laid in with them; for, as the old song says—

“His wit is but weak, father;
  His gifts they are but sma’;
But the bouk that’s under his breast bane,
  It grieves me warst of a.”’

‘If thou singest this nonsense of me,’ said the friar, ‘lo, I will smite thee upon the mouth; yea, upon the cheek-bone will I smite thee, till thine eyes shall gush out like two fountains of waters.’ And so saying, he began to look about him for some missile weapon to throw at the bard’s face, his breast burning with indignation – for he loved not the tenor of the poet’s conversation to the maid.

Tam and Jordan encouraged the friar to make the assault, in hopes that the poet might be dislodged or affronted; but Yardbire restrained the warmth of the friar, not being aware of his real sentiments, and ordered peace and good fellowship.

Dame Robson covered the hearth with a huge fire; and her husband bringing in a leg of beef, set it upon the table, and bade every one help himself.

‘The words of thy mouth are exceeding good, and sweet unto the ear,’ said the friar, ‘as doubtless thy food is to the taste.’ With that he rose and helped himself to three nice and extensive slices of raw beef, and these he roasted on the tongs which he had just lifted to smite the poet on the head.

In good truth, though every one cooked his own supper, as was the fashion of that iron time, there was none did it half so nicely as the friar, nor so bunglingly as Jordan, whose supper, though long behind the others in being ready, was so unshapely a piece, and so raw on the one side, that the friar observed, ‘it was like Ephraim of old, as a cake unturned.’ Some roasted their meat on old swords, some on spindles, for their hosts took no heed how they were fitted, or in what manner they shifted in these respects; seemingly satisfied that they had plenty for the cooking, and leaving them to cook it or eat it raw, as they chose. The poet made haste, and, first of all, cooked two or three nice slices for the maiden, giving her what she would take before he would taste a morsel himself. Some commended him for this, and others jeered him; but the friar, in his grave moral style, said the severest things of all. From the very commencement of the journey, a jealousy or misunderstanding began to subsist between these two, which never again subsided till they came to blows.

The poet answered him again with a song:

‘Keep ye to your books and your beads, goodman,
Your Ave Marias and creeds, goodman;
For gin ye end as ye’re begun,
There will be some crack of your deeds, goodman.’

At length the party retired to rest, all save Jordan and their worthy host. The latter never slept in the night; he had always some watching, walking, or work in hand that suited that season best: and as for Gibby, he determined to sit up all night to watch that the poet made no encroachments on the place of Delany’s repose. Robson encouraged his purpose, joined him heartily in conversation, listened to his longwinded stories with apparent delight, and, when all the rest were asleep, wormed the whole business of the embassy out of the shallow laird, who unfortunately testified his fears that they were carrying the lovely maiden and boy to the old warlock to be a sacrifice to the devil. Robson appeared terribly confounded at this piece of intelligence – for from the time that he heard it he conversed no more with Jordan. About one in the morning he began to put on his snow-boots, as if preparing for a journey.

‘Where are ye going at this time of night?’ enquired the laird.

‘I maun gang out an’ see how the night wears,’ said Robson; ‘I hae sax score o’ Scots queys that are outlyers. If I let the king’s ellwand ower the hill, I’ll hae them to seek frae the kips o’ Kale.’

Gibby accompanied him to the door, hoping the king’s ellwand would not be over the hill, for he had no good will to part with his companion. But as soon as Robson turned his eye to the sky, ‘Ha, gude faith, I maun post away!’ said he, ‘Yonder’s the king’s ellwand already begun to bore the hill; ay, there’s ane o’ the goud knobs out o’ sight already, an’ I hear the queys rowting ower the waterfa’ o’ the height. Gude morrow t’ye, laird, I’m ower lang here.’

Gibby returned in to the blazing fire; and hearing so many persons all snoring in sleep, he caught the infection, stretched himself upon a divot seat, and joined the chorus with as much zeal as any of them.

Morning came, and our embassy made ready for proceeding on their journey; but Robson still was wanting, at which both his dame and household lads seemed to wonder, otherwise the rest would have taken no notice of it. Gibby told her about the queys that were outlyers, but she only answered him with a hem! and a slight shake of the head. Charlie, who knew his man well, began to smell a rat; and, calling Gibby to the door, he inquired if he had hinted ought of their business to their host. The laird at first denied; but Charlie questioned him till he confessed the whole, at which Charlie was exceedingly angry; and hearing that he had informed him all about the maiden, and of what family she was sprung, he called Gibby a worthless inconsiderate being, and said he had ruined their expedition, for that he knew Robson kept up a correspondence with the Halls, who were broken men, and many of them skulking about the border; that Delany had uncles, cousins, and a brother living, if she was the man’s daughter she was supposed to be, and that these would without fail waylay them, and kill them every man, for the sake of rescuing her. ‘Robson,’ said he, ‘is altogether selfish, and has some end to serve; perhaps to get the maid into his own hands, for he seemed mightily taken with her beauty; and I calculate widely amiss if we are not watched from this house, and whether we return or proceed we shall be attacked in the first strait or lonely place that we come at.’ Jordan looked exceedingly out of countenance, and every feature of his face altered. ‘What had I ado to tell the rascal?’ exclaimed he,

‘or wha wad hae thought o’ him playing us sic a trick? Twa-faced dog that he is! It wad be weel done to let his liver pree the taste o’ steel!’

Charlie made him promise that he would not mention the circumstance to one of the party, as it was only a surmise, and might impede their progress to no purpose; and forthwith they mounted, armed with such armour as they had, and all, save Gibby Jordan, as cheerful and as jealous of one another as they were on the preceeding day. That worthy kept close by the side of muckle Charlie, and looked so sharp about him, that he perceived every shepherd, traveller, and cairn that appeared on the border fells, always testifying his alarm to his friend that perhaps yon was one of the Halls watching.

Charlie had resolved to go by Jedburgh straight for Oakwood castle; but his suspicions of Robson made him resolve to hold more to the eastward, in order to keep the open road. He knew that if they were watching him, it would be at the fords of Kale or Oxnam, on the Jedburgh road; and by taking the east path, he would not only elude them, but, in case of a pursuit, be near the outposts of the Scottish army.

For a good way they saw nothing, and began to think themselves in safety; but, in coming down Sowerhope-Middle, a little from the point of the debated land, three horsemen appeared to the westward of them. ‘His presence be about us,’ said Gibby – ‘yonder *are* the Halls now!’ Charlie said nothing, but kept watch. One of the yeomen vanished in a twinkling at full speed, the other two came at a brisk canter to our notable embassy.

‘What do they mean?’ said Jordan: ‘Do these two fellows propose to conquer us all?’

‘It wad appear that they do,’ said Charlie, ‘for they come on us without halt or hesitation.’

‘I hardly think they’ll succeed,’ added Gibby, ‘although they’re twa dangerous looking chaps. For Godsake, Yardbire, tak care o’ their back strokes; if they bring you down, our chance will be the waur.’

Charlie then called to the rest of his cavalcade, ‘Friends, here are some strangers come to join us. Tell them nothing either good or bad, but keep on at a round trot. See, we are not far from the towers of Roxburgh. Whatever these men may say to you, make them nothing the wiser.’

‘I will not so much as say unto them, whence cometh thou, or whither art thou going?’ said the friar.

‘I’ll sing them a ditty of beauty and love,
Of the wing of the raven, the eye of the dove,
And beings all purer than angels above.’
said the poet.

‘Sic a rhame o’ nonsense is there!’ said Tam Craik: ‘If ony o’ the dogs say an impertinent thing to me I’ll gar his teeth gang down his throat like bristled beans.’

It was not long before the two mosstroopers joined the party. They were tall athletic men, armed at all points, and their manner had a dash of insulting impertinence in it.

‘A good morning, and fair pace to you, noble and worthy gentlemen!’ said the foremost: ‘May we presume to be of the party?’

‘You may *presume*,’ said the deil’s Tam, ‘for that is what befits you; if you are willing to put up with the presumer’s reward.’

‘You are witty, sir, I suppose,’ said the trooper; ‘and pray what may that reward be?’

‘Yes, I am witty,’ said Tam; ‘and my wit is sharp when it is not in its sheath. Do you understand me? As for the reward of presumption, it is in Scotland to be crankit before and kicked behind.’

‘The road is at least as free to us as it is to you,’ said the mosstrooper; ‘and of that we intend to avail ourselves for the present. We go to join the army before Roxburgh, whither are you bound?’

‘We follow our noses,’ said Tam; ‘but they guide us not to the army before Roxburgh, and into your rearward they caution us not to enter. Raw hides and rank bacon, keep your distance.’

While Tam Craik and the trooper were thus jangling on before, Charlie said to Jordan, ‘Laird, what do you think o’ yoursel’ now? Ye hae played us a fine pliskie wi’ your ill-tackit tongue! It is my thought that ere we ride a mile and a half we’ll be attacked by a hale troop o’ horse. That chap that disna speak is ane o’ the wale o’ the Ha’s: I ken him weel for a’ his half visor. The other horseman that left them on the height is ower to the fords of Kale, and, if I guess right, he’ll appear at yon scroggy bush wi’ sae mony at his back that we wad hardly be a mouthfu’ to them, an’ that in less time than ane wad gang a mile.’

‘It is an ill business this,’ said Gibby: ‘It brings me in mind o’ – o’ mair than I’s name. But, gudesake, Yardbire, an ye be sure he is ane o’ the Halls,

what for do nae ye rin your sword in at the tae side o' him an' out at the tither? The sooner a knave like that is put down the better.'

'Fair occasion, an' face to face, Peatstacknowe, an' ye sanna see Charlie Scott slack; but ye wadna hae me stick a man, or cleave him down ahint his back, an' that without fair warning and fair arming?'

'Ay, honour an' generosity are braw things, but life's a brawer thing an' a better thing than ony o' the twa. For my part, I wad never stop. My very heart flighters when I look at him, an' I amaist think I find his steel quivering at my midriff. I wish I had a drive at him, wi' a chance o' a hale head.' – And from that time Gibby leaned himself forward on his saddle, and fixed his large grey eyes on the mosstrooper like a pointer going to fly on his game; and, in that attitude, he rode several times close up to his side, or very nearly opposite to him, laying his hand now and then on his hilt; but Charlie observed that he never looked his foe in the face with threatening aspect, and, perplexed as he was, could not help laughing at Gibby.

Yardbire now putting the spurs to Corby, galloped aslant the brae to a rising ground, whence he could see if any enemy was approaching by the swire from the fords of Kale, as he suspected. He had not well gained the height before he saw a dozen horsemen coming at the light gallop, but one part of the cavalcade considerably behind the others, owing to their being either worse mounted or worse horsemen.

By this time Charlie's own friends were coming round the bottom of the hill below him, quarrelling with the strangers so loudly, that Charlie heard their voices ascending on the gale in most discordant notes. The deil's Tam and the English trooper had never since their meeting ceased the jibe and the keen retort; but Tam's words were so provokingly severe, that the mossman was driven beyond all further forbearance. Just when they were at the hottest, the helmets of the front men of the Northumberland cavalcade began to appear in the swire; a circumstance that was well noted by their offended kinsman, but of which Tam was perfectly unconscious.

'Well, now, thou jaundiced looking thief,' said the moss-trooper, turning his horse's head towards Tam's left hand, and making him amble and curvette with his side foremost; 'thou lean, nerveless, and soul-less jabberer, all tongue and nothing else – I say, what hast thou to say more?'

The alteration in the man's key of voice somewhat astounded Tam; but his perverse nature would not let him soften his reply, although he liked as

well to see others fall into a mischief as himself. ‘Eh? what do I say?’ said he; and with that he turned his horse’s head to that of the other, making their two noses to meet; and caricaturing the Englishman’s capers, he laughed sneeringly and triumphantly in his face. ‘What do I say? Eh? what do I say? I say I thought I heard wind, and smelled it a wee too. Hagg-hiding fox that thou art! Wild tike of the moors, dost thou think Tam Craik fears thy prancing and thy carrion breath, or ony o’ the bur-throated litter of which thou art the outwale? Nay, an capering and prancing show ought of a spirit, I can caper and prance as well as thou. Out on thee, thou bog-thumper, thou base-born heather-blooter, what do *you* say? Or what *dare* you say?’

Tam had by this time drawn his sword completely to cow the Englishman, and put him to silence; – but he saw what Tam did not see, and knew more than he.

‘I dare both say and do, and that thou shalt find,’ said the trooper; and forthwith he attacked Tam with all his prowess, who, not quite expecting such a thing gave way, and had very nearly been unhorsed; he, however, fought stoutly, defending himself, though manifestly at the disadvantage. The brave frair, at the first clash of the swords, wheeled about his mule, and drawing out a good sword from under his frock, (for he wore the sword on the one side and the cross on the other,) he stretched it forth, pointing it as if to thrust it between them. But, addressing himself to the Englishman, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Put up *thy* sword again into its place, or verily I will smite thee with the edge of *my* sword.’

The other Englishman, who had never yet opened his mouth, and who had always kept apart, as if anxious to conceal who he was, now rode briskly up to the fray; and perceiving the quick approach of his friends, and judging his party quite secure of victory, he struck up the friar’s sword in apparent derision. But the inveterate laird of the Peatstacknowe had been watching him all this time, as one colley dog watches another of which he is afraid, in order to take him at an advantage, and the moment that his arm was stretched, so that his sword came in contact with the friar’s, Gibby struck him behind, and that with such violence that the sword ran through his body. The wounded trooper reined up his steed furiously, in order to turn on his adversary; Gibby reined his up as quickly to make his escape, but the convulsive force of the Englishman threw his horse over, and in its fall it tumbled against the legs of Gibby’s horse with such force that it struck them

all four from under him, and both he and his rider fell in a reverse direction, rolling plump over the wounded warrior and his forlorn encumbered steed, that was pawing the air at a furious rate. The two horses falling thus on different sides, their iron-shod hoofs were intermixed, and clashing and rattling away in a tremendous manner, tremendous at least to poor Gibby, whose leg and thigh being below his charger, he was unable to extricate himself. ‘Happ, Davie, happ!’ cried he to the steed: ‘Up you stupid, awkward floundering thief! Happ, Davie, happ!’ Davie could neither happ nor weynd, but there he lay groaning and kicking above his master, who was in a most deplorable plight.

Charlie perceiving the commencement of the fray, was all this while galloping furiously toward the combatants. But the battle was of short duration; for the English trooper, seeing his comrade fall he wist not how, and the friar and Tam having both their swords pointed at him, broke furiously through between them and fled towards his companions, Tam being only enabled to inflict a deep wound on the hinder part of the horse as he passed by.

‘I have made him to pass away as the stubble that is driven by the whirlwind,’ said the friar; ‘yea, as the chaff before the great wind, so is he fled from the arm of the mighty. Brother, I say unto thee, that thou hadst better arise!’ continued he, looking upon the disconsolate Jordan; and passing by on the other side with great *sang froid*, he rode up to Delany, the boy Elias, and the poet, the latter of whom had not been engaged, but, drawing his sword manfully, had stood as a guard to the other two.

Tam Craik pursued his enemy, although apparently not with a fixed design of overtaking him; and Gibby, being thus left all alone with the two inverted horses and the incensed moss-trooper, extended his voice to an amazing pitch, for he knew not what state of health and strength his opponent retained. This was a horrid consideration; for if he should disengage himself and get up first, there was an end of him of the Peatstacknowe. His nasal twine was increased by his dread, and he cried so vehemently, that his cries grew like the cries of a peacock.

Charlie Scott rode up to the main group, who continued to advance at a quiet pace, for they knew nothing as yet of the approaching danger. He also called and made signs to Tam Craik to return; and as soon as he came up to them he pointed out their pursuers, and charged them to ride for their lives.

‘We are betrayed,’ said he; ‘but the horses of our enemies are jaded, ours are fresh; therefore, brave lads, in our master’s name, spare neither spur, nor horse-flesh. Haud on your way, an’ never look ower your shoulders: you will find Corby an’ me twa gude back friends.’

The friar bent himself forward over the mane of his mule, and opening his eyes wide abroad, he put the spurs to his steed, and set off ‘with the swiftness of the roebuck or the hart,’ as he termed it.

The boy pursued hard after him; and the bard, taking hold of Delany’s bridle by both reins below the neck, for fear her steed should stumble and throw his lovely rider, bade her whip on and fear nothing, and in this friendly guise they also made good speed. Charlie then galloped back to see if any life remained in his friend Gibby – for he only saw him at a distance go down in the encounter, without being exactly versed in the circumstances of his overthrow; but he thought he heard one loud squeak arise from the field after the rest had left it, something like that sent forth by the small drone of the bagpipe; and, guessing that the laird was yet alive, he galloped back to see. By the way he met the deil’s Tam, who returned with him, and when they came in view of the spot where the two prostrate heroes had been left, they saw a very curious scene, the more curious because it was transacted by our worthy laird in the presiding belief that he was not seen, for he was too much concerned in his own affairs to perceive the approach of his friends. The Englishman’s horse making an exertion, by pressing his feet against the ribs of the laird’s Davie, by that means pushed himself forward, and Gibby perceived plainly that his enemy was to be first released. The struggles that Gibby then made were enormous. ‘Happ, Davie, happ!’ cried he: ‘O mother of God, what shall become of me! Happ, Davie, happ, my man; happ, happ, happ!’ and, as a last resource, he reared up his body and struck at the Englishman’s limb that was above his horse, crying out to Davie to happ, in bitterness of soul. Davie was not long; for the next moment after the Englishman’s horse rose, he got up also, his feet then getting to the ground; but the stirrup that had been under him was crushed together, and there his master’s foot remained fixed. Gibby was worse than ever. ‘Wo, Davie, wo! Tproo, ye thief!’ cried he. Davie, finding the weight at his side, wheeled about, and dragged the unfortunate laird round across the breast of the trooper Hall, who seized him by the neck. ‘Was there ever a man guidit this gate!’ cried Gibby. ‘Honest man, an ye

please, let gae; it wasna me that hurt ye.' The man answered him not; but Davie being scared by the struggle sprung aside, and the Englishman keeping his hold, Gilbert's foot was released by the loss of his boot. He was not long in making a bold effort to rise, and though Hall hung by his neck a little, it had been in the last agony of receding life that he had seized him, and he dropped dead on the green, having both fists clenched on his breast, in the act of still holding his rival.

When Gibby saw how matters stood, he began to value himself on his courage. 'I's gar ye! I's gar ye!' cried he, lifting up his sword, and giving the dead man several desperate gashes, and always between every stroke repeating, 'H'm! I's gar ye!' His two friends being now hard beside him, the sound of their horses' feet made him start; but lifting his eye, and perceiving who they were, he again repeated his blows, and continued his threats in a louder key –. 'H'm! I's gar ye! I's gar ye, billy! I's learn you to throttle me!'

'Fy, lay on, laird!' cried Tam; 'dinna ye see that the man's no half dead yet?'

'I think I hae done for him;' said Gibby: 'He brings me a-mind o' a wife that had to kill her cat thrice ower. I's learn the best o' the haggies-headed Ha's to meddle wi' me!'

'I think he'll do that ane, however, Gibby; if he had e'en the nine lives o' the wife's cat,' said Charlie: 'therefore, an ye please, put up your sword, an' mount your horse. It's no a time now to examine whether ye hae behaved in a sodger-like manner wi' that bold trooper. If I wist ye had not, it should be the last hour I should ride in your company – but mount quick an' ride; for see whar the rest o' the Ha's are coming across us. Ilk horse an' man do what he can, or dear will be our raide, an' yours, friend, the dearest of a'.'

One look filled Gilbert's eye. He mounted Davie, with the one boot off and the other on, and there was little occasion to bid him ride. Before they turned the corner of the hill, their pursuers came so close on them, that they looked very like cutting off their retreat; but a bog, around which the English were forced to cast a wide circuit, saved our three heroes, and gave them the start, by fully a half mile, of their foes, who still came in a straggling way as their horses could keep up. After a hard chace of two Scottish miles they came up with the friar, whose mule being too heavy loaden had begun to fag. When he saw them gaining on him so hard, he judged that all was over with him, and spurred on his jaded beast in vain. 'O

that my flesh were as my armour or my clothing,' cried he, 'that I might put it off at will, and escape from the face of mine enemies, Lo! I shall be left all alone, and surrounded and taken and slain.' As he divined, so it fell out; the others were soon by him, and he was left the hindermost. Then they heard him lamenting to himself in his own sublime eastern stile, that he had not the wings of the eagle or the dove, that he might bear away to the mountains and the cliffs of the rocky hills, to elude the dreadful weapons of death, so often reared over his head, and so often warded by the arm of heaven.

'Poor devil!' said muckle Charlie, the tear standing in his eye: 'Od I canna leave him after a'. Come what will, I for ane shall stand or fa' wi' him. I whiles think there's mair in that body than we moorland men wot of – I canna leave him to be cut in pieces.'

'O fy, let him tak his chance,' said Tam; 'let him bide his weird; he deserves it a'. What signifies the creature? He's just a thing made up o' hypocritical rant, empty words, and stuffed paunches. Let him bide the buffet that fa's to his share.'

'Ay, what signifies sic a corpulation?' said Jordan. 'It will be lang or *he* bring down man an' horse in an encounter. He brings me in mind o' a capon that claps his wings, but craws nane. Let him tak his chance.'

'Na, but callans, troth my heart winna let me,' said Charlie: 'For his good deeds, or his ill anes he's answerable to heaven, an' neither to you nor me. But he's a fellow creature, an' has nane to look to for help but us at this time. Life's sweet to us a', an' it's unco hard to leave our master's bedesman just to be sacrificed. Therefore, come what will, I'll turn an' lend the friar a hand. As for you twa, ride on; the young couple that are committed to our charge may escape.' With that he wheeled Corby's head about, and rode back to meet the gospel friar.

When he met him, the foremost of the riders had advanced within a bow shot, and was fast gaining ground. The friar still continued to spur on, and though his mule likewise continued the motion of one that gallops, the progress that he made was hardly discernible. He had a sort of up and down hobble that was right laughable to behold in one riding for his life. When he saw the dauntless Yardbire return to meet him, with his large seven feet sword drawn, and heaved over his right shoulder, he lifted up his voice and wept, and he said unto him; – 'Blessed be thou, my son! The blessing of a

man ready to perish light upon thee! And now, lo, I will draw forth my sword and return with thee to the charge, and thou shalt see what a poor bedesman can do.'

'It is brawly said, good friar – but gin ye wad save yoursel' an' me, ride. An we could but mak the end o' the Thief-gate, they should buy our twa lives dear. If thou wilt but exert man an' beast, father, you an' I shall fight, flee, or fa' thegither. But see, we are already overtaken, and in the enemy's hands.'

The foremost of the riders was now hard behind them; but, perceiving Charlie, he reined up his horse and looked back for his comrades. The frair gave a glance back, and he said, 'Lo, thou art a mighty man of valour, and behold there is but one; do thou fall upon him and smite him; why should one pursue two?'

'I hae heard waur advices frae mair warlike men,' said Charlie; 'Ride ye on, father, an' lose nae time. Gude faith! I sal gie this ane his breakfast.'

Charlie as he said this put the spurs to Corby, and rode full speed against the pursuer. The trooper set himself firm in his stirrups and assumed his defence, for he saw from the prowess of Corby that it was vain to fly. Just as Charlie's mighty sword was descending on his casque, a check that he gave his horse in the hurry of the moment made him rear on end, and Charlie's stroke coming down between his ears, clove his head almost into two halves. The horse reeled and fell; but how it fared with his rider, Charlie never knew; for before he got his horse turned, there were other three of the Halls close at hand. Charlie fled amain. He was nothing afraid of himself, for he knew Corby could outstrip them by one half of the way; but his heart bled for the poor friar, whom he saw he would either be obliged to leave, or fight for him against such odds as it would be madness to withstand. The frair had, however gained the height, and having now a long sloping descent all the way to the Thief-gate-end, he was posting on at an improved pace. Charlie had one sole hope remaining of saving the friar, and that was the gaining the above-mentioned point before they were overtaken. The warriors carried no whips in those days, depending altogether on the ample spur – therefore Charlie, as a last resource, pulled down a large branch from a hazel tree, and attacked the hinder parts of the father's mule with such a torrent of highsounding strokes, that the animal, perhaps more sullen than exhausted, seemed to recover new life and vigour,

and fled from the assault like a deer, in the utmost terror and dismay. Little wonder was it! He heard the sound of every descending stroke coming on like the gathering tempest; and, clapping his tail close down between his hips, pricking up his long ears, and looking back first with the one eye and then with the other, he went at such a rate that Corby could do little more than keep up with him.

'My swiftness is greater than I can bear,' cried the friar, pronouncing the sentence all in syllables for want of breath; 'verily I shall fall among the cliffs of the rocks by the side of the highway.'

His danger increased with his fears; for the mule perceiving that exertion availed not, and that there was no escaping from the fierceness of his pursuer's wrath, began to throw up his heels violently at every stroke, nevertheless continuing to exert himself between these evolutions. The frair's riding-gear began to get into disorder, and with great difficulty he retained his seat; therefore he cried out with a loud voice, 'I pray of thee, my son, to desist, for it is better for me to perish by an enemy's hand than thine; seest thou not my confusion and despair – verily I shall be dashed in pieces against the stones.'

The friar saw nought of Charlie's intent, else he would not have besought him so earnestly to desist. The Thief-gate-end was now hard at hand. It is still well known as a long narrow path alongst the verge of a precipice, and all the bank above it was then a thicket of brushwood and gorse, so close that the wild beast of the desart could not pass through it. It was, moreover, shagged with rocks, and bedded with small stones, and the path itself was so narrow, that two horsemen could scarcely ride abreast. By such a strenuous manoeuvre on the parts of Charlie and the mule, the two flyers got into this path, without having lost any ground of their pursuers. When Charlie saw this, he began to breathe more freely, and, flinging away his hazel branch, he again seized his mighty weapon in his right hand.

'Let the chields come as close on us now, an they dare,' said he.

The mule still continued to eye him with a great deal of jealousy, and, perceiving the brandish that he gave his long sword when he said this, he set off again full speed; so that it was a good while before the friar got time to reply. As soon as he got leisure to speak, he opened his mouth and said – 'My son, wilt thou lift up thine arm against a multitude? or canst thou contend with the torrent of the mighty waters?'

‘Well, well, they may perhaps lead that winna drive,’ said Charlie; and he went by the friar at a light gallop, leaving him behind, who prayed to the other not to leave him nor forsake him; but it was a device of Yardbire’s, and a well conceived one. He saw that as long as he kept the rear guard, and rode behind the friar, the men that pursued them would not separate on that long narrow path; therefore he vanished among the bushes, keeping, however, always within hearing of the mule’s feet. Accordingly, at the first turn of the road, the foremost of the English troopers, seeing the jolly bedesman posting away by himself, put the spurs to his steed, and made a furious dash at him. The friar cried out with a loud voice; and, seeing that he would be overtaken, he turned round and drew his sword to stand on the defensive; and actually not only bore the first charge of his opponent with considerable firmness, but had ‘very nigh smitten him between the joints of the harness,’ as he termed it. It happened, moreover, very singularly, from the perversity of the mule, that in the charge the combatants changed sides, at the imminent peril of the Englishman; for the mule brushed by his horse with such violence, and leaned so sore to the one side, that both the horse and his rider were within an inch of the verge of the precipice.

The friar had no sooner made his way by, than he saw another rider coming like lightning to meet him in the face; but at the same time he heard the voice of Charlie Scott behind him, and the rending crash of his weapon. This cheered the drooping spirits of the brave friar, who had been on the very point of crying for quarter. ‘They beset me before and behind,’ cried he, ‘yet shall my hand be avenged. Come on, thou froward and perverse one.’ So saying he assumed his guard, and met his foe face to face, seeing he had no alternative. The Englishman drew a stroke, but got not time to lay it on; for just as the mule and his tall horse met, the former, in the bitterness of his ire, rushed between his opponent and the upper bank, and pressed against his fore counters with such energy, that he made the leg next him to slacken, and the horse reared from the other. The intention of the irritated mule was to crush his master’s leg, or, if possible, to rub him from off his back; and therefore, in spite of the rein he closed with the Englishman’s tall steed in a moment, and almost as swift as lightning. The English moss-trooper had raised his arm to strike, but seeing his horse shoved and rearing in that perilous place, he seized the rein with his sword hand. The mule finding the substance to which he leaned give way, pressed to it the harder.

It was all one to him whether it had been a tree, a horse, or a rock; he shouldered against it with his side foremost so strenuously, that in spite of all the trooper could do, the fore feet of his horse on rearing, alighted within the verge of the precipice. The noble animal made a spring from his hinder legs, in order to leap by the obstreperous mongrel; but the latter still coming the closer, instead of springing by he leaped into the open void, aiming at the branches of an oak that grew in a horizontal direction from the cliff. It was an old and stubborn tree, the child of a thousand years; and when the horse and his rider fell upon its hoary branches, it yielded far to the weight. But its roots being entwined in the rifted rock as far as the stomach of the mountain, it sprung upward again with a prodigious force to regain its primitive position, and tossed the intruding weight afar into the unfathomed deep. Horse and rider went down in a rolling motion till they lessened to the eye, and fell on the rocks and water below with such a shock, that the clash sounded among the echoes of the linn like the first burst of the artillery of heaven, or the roar of an earthquake from the depths of the earth.

Charlie Scott gazed on the scene with horror; every feature of his countenance was changed, and every hair on his great burly head stood on end. He gave a look to heaven, crossed himself, and said a short prayer, if a prayer it may be called that consisted only of four syllables. It consisted merely in the pronunciation of a name, too sacred to be set down in an idle tale; but he pronounced it with an emphasis that made it doubly affecting. The friar, on the contrary, astonished at his own prowess, or rather at that of his mule, beheld the scene with wonder, it is true, but also with a shade of ostentation. ‘I have overthrown the horse and his rider,’ said he, ‘and they are sunk down as a stone into the mighty waters.’ Corby manifested the fright that he was in, by loud and reiterated snortings; the mule also was astonied, and, that he might witness the horrific scene in more perfection, he kept his tail close to the precipice, and looked back.

‘Now, by my honour as a man and a warrior, father,’ said Charlie, ‘you are a man amang ten thousand. I never knew of a bedesman who behaved so gallantly, nor have I seen a knight behave better. How durst you close so instantaneously and furiously with both these valiant troopers?’

‘Thou hadst better put that question to my mule,’ said the friar – ‘for it is a truth that he hath that in him that is the ruin of many people, viz. obstinacy of heart. When he smelleth the battle he disdaineth all parley or

courtesy, as thou beholdest, but rusheth upon his adversary like one of the bulls of Bashan.'

At that moment the friar's eye caught a glance of several horsemen close upon them, but as they could only come one man rank, they paused at seeing their enemies in quiet possession of the way, and standing in peaceful colloquy, apparently about something else.

'By the life of Pharaoh,' said the friar, gazing all around, 'I had forgot the man whom I first engaged and smote as he passed by.'

'You will see nae mair o' him, father,' said Charlie; 'I gae him a deadly wound, but the saddle was locked to the horse, and the man to the saddle, and the furious animal has escaped away to the forest with the dead man on its back.'

'Thou art indeed a man of valour,' said the friar; 'and here will we keep our ground. I will do more in our defence than thou hast yet witnessed; therefore, be not afraid, my son, for that sword of thine is a good sword.'

'It is a good sword at a straik,' returned Charlie; 'but it's no very handy at making a defence. But an I get the first yerk of a chield, I'm no unco feared for his return. However, father, this sword, sic as it is, shall be raised in your defence as lang as my arm can wag it. I like the man that will stand a brush when a pinch comes – see, thae chaps darena come on us. But, ill luck to the coward! gin they winna come to us, we'll gang to them.'

'I will certainly go with thee,' said the friar; 'but I know the nature of the beast that I bestride, and that it will at the first onset bear me into the thickest of the battle; therefore, be not thou far from me in my need, for, though nothing afraid, yet I know it will carry me into peril. Come, let us go and smite these men with the edge of the sword.'

'Gallant friar,' said Charlie, 'the Thief-road is lang an' narrow, an' there's hardly a bit o't that they can come on us twa in a breast; stand ye still; or be chopping on your way, an' I'll let you see yon lads get a surprise for aince.'

'Nay, I will certainly stand with thee in battle,' said the friar; 'thinkest thou I will stand and be a looker on, when my preserver is in jeopardy? Lo, my heart is as thy heart, my arm as thy arm, and – but I cannot say my horse is as thy horse, for the beast is indeed froward in his ways, and perverse in all his doings.'

Charlie hardly smiled at the phrase of the worthy friar – for he meditated an attack on their pursuers, and his eye kindled with his heart toward the

battle. He heaved up his sword-arm twice at its full stretch, to feel if it was nowise encumbered in the armour, and putting Corby in motion, he rode deliberately up to the face of his enemies. The foremost man spoke to him, demanding what he wanted; but he only answered by heaving his sword a little higher, and making his horse mend his pace. In one second after that he was engaged with the first man, and in two seconds the horse and his rider had fallen in the middle of the path. Charlie listed not coming to close quarter; his sword was so long and heavy, that it was quite unhandy in warding the blows of a short and light weapon. His aim, therefore, was always to get the first stroke, which was as apt to light on the horse as the man, and thus down both of them went. Springing by the prostrate warrior, he attacked the second and the third in the same manner, and with the same success, always either cutting down the trooper or cleaving the head of his horse at the first stroke. The path was now in the utmost confusion. Owing to the pause that had taken place, all the riders had come up and crowded each other behind, some crying, 'He is a devil!' and others at a greater distance shouting out, 'Down with the Scot! down with him!' Charlie regarded not their cries, but laid about him with all his might, till, after striking down three of the foremost and one horse, those next to him were glad to turn in order to effect their escape; but the hindermost on the path refusing for a while to give way, many of their friends fell a sacrifice to Charlie's wrath. He pursued them for a space, and might have cut them off every man, had he been sure that all was safe behind – but he had rushed by some wounded men and wounded horses, and knew not how matters stood with the friar.

As he dreaded, so it fell out. Two of the Englishmen who had fallen perhaps under their horses, had scrambled up the bosky precipice, and, as he returned, assailed him with large stones, a mode of attack against which he was unable to make the least resistance. Therefore, it was at the utmost peril of his life that he made his way back through the encumbered path to his friend the friar. This latter worthy had found it impossible to lend his friend any assistance. The beast that he bestrode was fonder of rubbing shoulders with a living brute, than a mangled or dead one; so he refused to come nearer the first that fell than about twice his own length, where he stood firm, turning his tail to the scene of battle, and looking back. Our two

heroes now set off at full speed after the rest of their party, whom they expected to overtake before reaching the outposts of the beleaguering army.

CHAPTER 12

Lord Duffus: I saw the appearance of a mounted warrior.
Whence did it come, or whither did it go?
Or whom did it seek here?
Hush thee, my lord;
The apparition spoke not, but passed on,
'Tis something dreadful; and, I fear me much,
Betokens evil to this fair array.

Trag. of the Prioress

The rest of our cavalcade continued to advance at a quick pace, not without anxiety. They were not afraid of their enemies coming behind them, for they had strong faith in the prowess of their friend, as well as his horse Corby. But when they came to the end of the narrow path, called the Thief-gate, there were two roads, and they knew not which of these to follow. As bad luck would have it, they took the most easterly, which led towards Yetholm, and left the Scottish army to the westward. In that path they continued to jog on, turning many a long look behind them for the approach of Charlie; and, at one time, they thought they got a view of him coming at a furious pace all alone; but the rider being at a great space behind them, he was shortly hid from their view in an intervening hollow, and it was long before they saw him any more. They judged that the friar was taken or slain, and began to talk of his loss in a very indifferent manner.

'Alas, how frigid and ungenial must be the hearts of you men in Scotland,' said Delany. 'Now, of all the men I have met with since I was brought from my own country, there is only one whose death I would more regret than that of the worthy and kind friar. He may have his whims and his peculiarities, but his manner is pleasing, and his speech has a strain of grandeur which I love. Where did he acquire that speech?'

'He gets it frae some auld-fashioned beuk,' said Tam, 'that he has pored on a' his days, an' translatit out o' other tongues, till he was nearly hanged

for it; and it's weel kend that he is now in hiding wi' our warden for fear o' his life, and has been these half dozen o' years; and though he pretends to be only a friar, he was aince a monk o' the first order of St Benedict, and president of a grand college in France.'

'I would like to converse with him,' said Delany, 'for I have always thought that he feigned to be something a degree lower than he is.'

'You said there was *but one* you would lament the loss of more,' said the poet: 'Pray, who may that *one* be?'

'Could you not guess?' returned she.

'How can I?' said he; 'but this I know, that to be the favoured one I would dive into the depths of the ocean—'

'It wad be for fear then,' said Tam.

'Or traverse the regions of ice,' continued the bard, 'or wander barefoot over burning sands, or—'

'O, alak for your poor feet!' said Delany, interrupting him; 'but rest satisfied you shall not be put to the test: it is not you.'

With such kind of chat did they beguile the way, till Elias, looking back, exclaimed, 'Mercy! see what a guise Yardbire is coming in!'

'St Mary protect us!' said the maid; 'he must be grievously wounded. See how he rides!'

Every one turned round his horse and looked at the approaching warrior; but it was wearing late, and they could not see with distinctness. The horse was coming rapidly, and with apparent impatience, but Charlie appeared as if he were riding in his sleep. When the horse came down hill he bent forward, and on climbing an ascent he bent back, riding with that sort of motion as if his back or neck were out of joint. The whole group showed manifest signs of fear at the approach of such a hideous apparition; and, quite in earnest, though in a pretended frolic, they wheeled about again, and gallopped away. The ground being uneven, and the night-fall coming on, they soon lost sight of him; and, continuing their career as fast as the road would permit, they seemed inclined to escape from their friend altogether. The maid had just begun to remonstrate on their unfriendly procedure, when they beheld the same unaccountable figure coming at the full gallop close behind them. Seeing that he was determined to be of the party, they suffered him to overtake them quietly. He came driving furiously up till he was in the middle of them, and then paused. No one had the courage to

speak to him, for he looked not up, nor regarded any of them. His helmed head nodded on his breast, and his arms hung loosely down by his side, the steel armlets rattling on the cuishes. At one time his horse came so near to that on which Delany rode, that she weened she saw the rider all covered with blood, and screamed out; yet in the twilight she could not be certain. The poet, who was never far from her side, and on whom her voice always acted like electricity, immediately demanded the cause of her alarm.

'O Carol!' said she, in an agitated whisper, 'we are haunted. That is a dead man that rides in our company.'

If the maid was alarmed, the poet was ten times more so. If she had said that a lion or a bear was in the company, it could not have struck such a chillness to the poor bard's heart; and, after all, it was no wonder, for there is something exceedingly appalling in the idea of having a dead man riding in one's company. The poet felt this in its fullest measure. He held in his horse and attempted a reply, but a dryness pervaded his mouth so much that he could not make himself intelligible. A damp had fallen on the whole party, and a breathless silence prevailed. Tam put the question, so natural, to him as he passed, 'Charlie, is this you?' – but none answered or regarded. They were riding up a slanting hill when the bard was first apprised of the nature of their guest, and shortly after the figure coming between him and the evening sky, its motions were altogether so hideous, that he roared out in perfect terror as loud as he could bray, scarce letting one bellow await another. This was still worse than the dumb appalling uncertainty in which they were before involved; till at last Tam, losing all patience, let loose his rage against the poet, calling him a bellowing beast, and many other opprobrious names. This encouraging Gibbie, who had the bard at no good will on account of the damsel, he said he brought him 'amind of a story that the fo'k o' Annandale tauld about Andrew Jardine's bull, that was better at booing than breeding.' The boy Elias now coming in behind them, and having heard what Delany said, cried softly, 'Hush! yeomen! hush! we are haunted; it is a ghost that rides in our company.'

They all turned their eyes to the mysterious figure, which they still thought resembled their champion Yardbire, as well as the horse did that which he rode, the redoubted Corby. The horse had started a little forward at the cries of the poet, but when the rest paused the figure seemed to wheel his horse around, and made a dead pause also, standing still with his face

toward them, and straight on the path before. Not one durst proceed. The figure neither moved nor threatened, but stood nodding its head on the height at every motion of the steed; yet our party were arrested on their way, nor knew they exactly in what place they were: But from the length of the way they had come, they were sure they were near the Scottish army on one side or other, and free from any danger of the foes they had left behind them on the Border. None of them were good guides in any case, and a man in fear is neither a fit guide for himself nor others. Fear had the sway, and fear gave the word of command without being disputed. The poet was the first to strike from the beaten path, and it was at no easy pace that he rode. He turned westward, and the rest all followed with main speed. Their progress was soon interrupted by a strong cattle fence made of stakes and the branches of trees interwoven, bespeaking the vicinity of some village, or place of human habitation. They soon broke through the fence, but by bad luck did not take time to make up the breach, which they left open, and posting forward came to a large house amid a number of smaller ones. The poet called for admittance in a moving and earnest stile, and at once resolved to take no denial. Before ever he paused, he told them he and his party had lost their way, and that they had seen a ghost.

‘Then you must be some murderers,’ said the men of the house – ‘and here you remain not to-night.’

‘We belong to the warden of the marches, the brave baron of Mountcomyn,’ said the poet, ‘and go on an errand of great import to the army. In that case we might demand what we only ask as a boon, namely, such lodging as the house affords.’

‘You had better keep that part to yourself,’ said the men of the house: ‘Though Sir Ringan is supreme in the middle marches, he is no favourite here. Our master’s name is Ker. He is with the Douglas, but may be home to-night. Calm sough and kitchen fare, or ride on.’

‘It brings me in mind o’ an auld proverb,’ said Gibbie, ‘that beggars should nae be choisers; sae, honest lads, bring us a light, for our horses are sair tired an’ maun be weel put up.’

The party, it will be remembered, consisted only of five, exclusive of Charlie and the friar. They had drawn up their horses close to the hall door, and were still on horseback when the men turned into the house for a light. The poet, whose eager eyes were still on the watch, chancing to look at the

heads of his associates between him and the sky, thought he discovered one too many.

‘Surely there are six of us,’ said he in a hurried tremulous voice. ‘Six of us!’ said Tam, as doubting the statement.

‘Six of us? No, surely?’ said Delany.

At that instant a lad came out with a lanthorn, and held it up to look at the party. The poet was nearest the door, and the light shone full on him and the rider that was next him. He cast his eyes on that rider – but one glance was enough to bedim his eye-sight, if not to scare away his reason. It had the appearance of a warrior sheathed in steel, but all encrusted in a sheet of blood. His mouth was wide open, and his jaws hanging down upon his breast, while his head seemed to be cleft asunder. The poet uttered a loud yell of horror, and flinging himself from his horse on the side opposite to that on which the phantom stood, he fell among the mud and stones at the door, yet ceased not to reiterate his loud cries like one in distraction. Every one jumped from his horse, and hurried in at the door; the man with the lanthorn also fled, and with the noise and uproar the horses galloped off, saddled and bridled as they were. As the guests ran into the hall, every one asked at all the rest what it was? ‘What is it?’ was all that could be heard; all asking the question, but none answering it. Even the people of the house joined in the query, and came all round the strangers, crying, ‘What is it? – What is it?’ – ‘I do not know – I do not know, Sir – I do not know upon my word.’

‘The people are all delirious,’ said the housekeeper: ‘– Can no one tell us what it was that affrighted you? – St Magdalene be with us! whom have we here?’

This was no other than the poor bard coming toward the light, creeping slowly on all-four, and still groaning as he came.

‘Here’s the chap that began the fray,’ said Tam, ‘you may speer at him. He rather looks as he were at ane mae wi’t. For my part, I just did as the rest did – ran an’ cried as loud as I could. When a dust is fairly begun, I think aye the mair stour that is raised the better. I’ll try wha will cry loudest again, an ye like – or rin round the fire wi’ ony o’ you, or out through the mids o’t either, at a pinch.’

Tam turned round his long nose to see if his jest had taken, for he always fixed his eyes stedfastly on one object when he spoke; but he found that his

jargon had been ill-timed, for no one laughed at it but himself. The rest were gathered round the bard; some pitying, but more like to burst with laughter at his forlorn state. He fetched two or three long-drawn moans, and then raising himself up on his knees, with his eyes fixed on the light, he rolled over, and fainted.

Delany first stooped to support his head, and was soon assisted by every female in the house, while the men only stood and looked on. By bathing his hands and temples with cold water, they soon brought him out of his faint, but not to his right senses. His looks continued wild and unstable, and ever and anon they were turned to the door, as if he expected some other guest to enter. A sober conference at last ensued; and as no one had seen or heard any thing at this last encounter, save the man that was taken ill, who a few moments before had been heard to say *there were six of them*, all began to agree that he had been seized with some sudden frenzy or delirium; till the lad, who had carried out the light, thrust in his pale face among the rest, and said – 'Na, na, my masters, it is nae for naething that the honest man's gane away in a kink; for, when I held up the bouet, I saw a dead man riding on a horse close at his side. He was berkened wi' blood off at the taes; and his mouth was open, and I saw his tongue hinging out.'

It may well be conceived what an icy chillness these words distilled round the heart of every one present. The effect on our travellers was particularly appalling, from the idea that they were haunted by a phantom from which they could not escape. The whole group closed around the fire, and the strangers recounted to the family the singular occurrence of their having lost two of their number by the way, and been pursued and overtaken by a phantom resembling one of them, and that the hideous spectre was, as it seemed, haunting them still. As they all agreed in the same story, it was not of a nature to be disregarded at a period when superstition swayed the hearts of men with irresistible power. The stoutest heart among them was daunted, and no one durst go out to the vaults to look after his master's cattle, nor to take in our travellers' horses, that were left to shift for themselves during the long winter night.

The next morning, between day-light and the sun-rising, the men began to peep abroad, and the first things they observed were some of the horses of our travellers going about in a careless, easy manner. This they looked on as a good omen, knowing that horses were terrified for spirits; and the men

joining in a body, they sallied out to reconnoitre. The horses had fared well, for they had fed at the laird's stacks of hay and corn all night; but as the men were going round to see how matters stood, they perceived a phenomenon, that, if it had not been open day-light, would have scared them from the habitation. This was the identical phantom-warrior still sitting unmoved on his horse, that was helping itself full liberally out of one of the laird's corn-ricks. The eye of day expels the films of superstition from the human eye. The men, after a short consulation, ventured to surround the phantom – to seize his horse – (who had given full proof that he at least was flesh and blood;) – and, after a good deal of trembling astonishment, they found that he was actually rode by a dead warrior, whose head was cleft asunder, and his whole body, both within and without the harness, encrusted in blood.

The mystery was soon cleared up; but none then knew who he was. It had become customary in that age for warriors, who went to engage others, on horseback, to lock themselves to the saddle, for fear of being borne out of their seats by the spears of their opponents in the encounter. This was the individual trooper who had come foremost in the pursuit of our party, he whom the friar jostled, and whom Charlie, encountering the moment after, had slain; but his suit of armour having kept him nearly upright in his saddle, his horse had run off with him, and followed after those of our travellers, as every horse will do that is let go on a highway and gets his will.

Glad were our travellers at an *eclaircissement* so fairly within the bounds of their comprehension, and when the poet saw the gash made in the helmet, he shook his head, and exclaimed, 'Ha! well I wot the mighty hand of Charlie has been here!'

Gibbie remarked that he himself had 'killed one very like him, only he was sure his wad never mount horse again.' But seeing Tam's ill-set eye fixed on him, he was afraid of something coming out relating to that encounter which he did not wish to hear blabbed; so he changed his tone, and, looking wise, said, 'The hale business brings me a-mind of a very good story that happened aince at Allergrain; an' if it be nae true it is behadden to the maker, for the sin o' the lie lyes nae at my door. The story, you see, is this –. There was a man, an' he had a wife; an' they had a son, an' they ca'ed him Jock—'

‘Now, d—n your particularity!’ said Tam Craik: ‘think you we have nought else to do but stand beside the bloody man and listen to a long-winded talk like that?’

The poet muttered over some old rhyme in unison with what he heard. If one word spoken chanced to occur in any old rhyme or song that he knew, he went over the sentence to himself, though it had no farther connection with it, or resemblance to it, than merely that word. This made his conversation altogether incomprehensible to those not acquainted with him, but it was always delightful to himself; a chance old rhyme brought to his remembrance, would have pleased him almost in any circumstances, while his words chimed naturally into measure.

Leaving the dead warrior at the house where they lodged for the people to bury as they liked, they proceeded to the army, in hopes of finding Charlie and the friar there; for without them they did not know how to accomplish their mission. These two heroes finding, on asking at a hamlet, that their friends had not passed on the road to Roxburgh, suspected what way they had gone, and turning to the southeast they followed them on the track to Yetholm, but missed them at the house into which they had been chased by the dead man, and rode searching for them the greater part of the night. Next morning they again went in search of them, and came up behind them at the convent of Maisondieu near to the Teviot, where a detachment of the army was stationed; and, after conversing two or three hours on the state of the army and garrison, they proceeded on their journey, and reached the abbey of Melrose that night. There they were welcomed by the brethren, and lodged comfortably. There also they got many strange stories told to them about Master Michael Scott, which made the very hairs of their heads stand on end, and the hearts of the boldest to palpitate. When the friar heard them, he seemed wrapt in deep thought; and he opened his mouth, and said: ‘If the things that thou hast spoken be according to the light that is in thee, and the truth that is told among men, then this man is not as other men, for the spirit of the immortals is in him, and he communeth with the prince of the power of the air. Nevertheless, I will go unto him, and I will speak to him face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend. Peradventure I shall tell him that which he knoweth not.’

When it was told to the abbot Lawrence, that the servants of the warden were come, and that they were accompanied by his chaplain and bedesman,

a learned man in all holy things, the father came to bestow upon them his benediction – for the baron of Mountcomyn had conferred many rich benefices on the abbey. At the first sound of the friar's voice, the abbot started, as if recollecting him; but on looking at the man his hope seemed to die away. Every time, however, that he spoke in his eastern style, the abbot fixed a look on him, as if he would fain have claimed acquaintance, which the friar perceiving, urged their departure with all the interest he had; and accordingly, about mid-day, they set out for Aikwood-castle, the seat of the renowned magician Master Michael Scott.

Ever since the stern encounter with the English mosstroopers on the Thief-road, Charlie had attached himself close to the friar, imagining that he saw his character in a new light, and that he was one who might either be roused to desperate courage, or impressed with notorious dread; and when he heard him say that he would speak to the enchanter face to face, he admired him still the more; for the business of addressing the Master was that which stuck sorest on the stomach of the doughty Yardbire. As for the poet, he scarcely seemed himself all that day. He looked at the mountains, and the wild romantic rivers branching among them in every direction, with looks of which it was hard to say whether they were looks of vacancy or affection, for he looked sometimes as at objects which he was never to see again. His tongue muttered long rhymes in which his heart had little share; so that Delany was obliged to detach herself from his society, and make up to the friar, whom she now addressed with much affection, and some degree of coquetry: –

'Dearest father, why have you neglected me so much on our journey? Ever since our first stage was got over, you have not deigned to take any notice of me. What have you seen in my conduct that you have thus shunned me? It is in sincerity that I assure you there is no man in whose conversation I so much delight.'

'Fairest among maidens!' said the friar, putting his arm gently around her neck, as her palfrey came close up by his side, 'say not so, but come near me, I will kiss thee with the kisses of my mouth, for thy love is sweeter to me than the vintage. Behold thou art even like a tower of alabaster shining from among the cedars of Lebanon. Thy bosom resembleth two young roes that are twins, and feed among the lilies of the valley.'

‘Hold, dear father!’ said she, ‘and do not let your gallantry run away with your good common sense. Yet would I love to hear that language spoken to another, for though it be nonsense it is still beautiful. Tell me, for I long to hear, where, or in what country, you learned to speak in that stile.’

‘Daughter of my people,’ said he, ‘I have learned that language at home and in a far country. In youth and in age hath it been my delight. At noon-tide when the sun shone in his strength, and in the silent watches of the night hath it been my meditation. In adversity hath it been my comfort, and in prosperity my joy; so that now it hath become unto me as my mother tongue, and other language have I none.’

‘Is it the language of the convent and the priory alone?’ said the maid.

‘No, thou rose of the desart,’ said the friar; – ‘it is not the language indeed, but the stile of language over one half of the habitable world. It is the language of all the kingdoms and countries of the east, from India even unto Ethiopia; and all the way as thou goest down towards the rising of the sun, yea from the river to the ends of the earth it prevaileth. But, O thou fairest among the daughters of women! that language did I not learn in the lands that are watered by the great river, even the river Euphrates. In Ur of the Chaldees have I not sojourned; nor on the mountains of Palestine have I lifted up my eyes. But I learned it from one little book; a book that is of more value to the children of men than all the gold of Ophir. O maiden, could I but make known unto thee the treasures of that book, the majesty of its stile, and the excellency of its precepts, it would make thine heart to sing for joy. If all the writings of this world, yea, if the world itself were to be laid in the balance with that book, they would be found wanting. The mountains may depart, and the seas may pass away, the stars, and the heavens in which they shine, may be removed, but the words of that book shall remain for ever and ever! And this language that I now speak to thee resembleth the words written therein; and I speak them unto thee that thou mayest hear and love them.’

‘Dear friar, teach me to read and understand that book, for my breast yearneth to know more about it. I am, it is true, not my own at present to give, but I have some forebodings here that tell me I soon shall; and, father, I will serve thee, and be thy handmaid, if thou wilt teach me the words and the mysteries of that little book.’

‘Alas! and wo is me, for the ignorance of my people!’ said he, with the tears streaming over his grim cheek; ‘they are troubled about that which availeth them nothing, while the way of life is hid from their eyes. Their leaders have caused them to err; and I, even I, have been a dweller in the tabernacles of sin! But the day-star hath shone upon my soul and my spirit: For that have I been persecuted, and hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, chased from the habitations of my brethren, and forced to dwell among a strange and savage people. Yet there are among them whom I love; and could I be the mean of opening thine eyes, and turning thee from darkness unto light, then would I know for what purpose the finger of heaven had pointed out my way to this barren wilderness. Thou can’st not be a servant or a handmaiden unto one who is little better than an outcast and a vagabond on the earth. But better days may come to us both: I am not what I seem; but, maiden, thou mayest trust me. My love for thee surpasseth the love of women, for it is with more than an earthly love that I behold and delight in thee. Come unto me this night, and I will tell thee things that shall make thine ears tingle. The book of wonders is here with me, and thou mayest look thereon and be glad.’

The poet and his associates listened to this rhapsody apart.

‘What book does he mean?’ said the poet: ‘If it is not True Thomas’s book, or the book of Sir Gawin, he must be speaking absolute nonsense. I could recite these to lovely Delany, word for word; and must this clumsy old friar wile her from me by any better book than these?’

‘You are clean mista’en, maister poeter,’ said Tam; ‘I ken mair about auld Roger than you do, or than ony that’s here. It is a book o’ black art that he carries about wi’ him, and studies on it night and day. He gat it at a place they ca’ Oxford, where they study nought else but sic cantrips. They hae tried to hang him, and they hae tried to cut off his head, and they hae tried to burn him at the stake; but tow wadna hang, water wadna drown, steel wadna nick, and a’ the fire o’ the land wadna singe ae hair o’ the auld loun’s head.’

‘Gude forgie me!’ said Charlie: ‘An that be true, Corby, you and I had maybe mair pith than our ain yon time. I wondered that he rade sae furiously on the drawn swords o’ men and armour, the auld warlock. He-he-he! we’ll aiblins try auld Michael at his ain weapons, an that be the gate.’

‘Ye maunna lippen ower muckle to a’ this,’ said he of the Peatstacknowe; ‘else ye may play like Marion’s Jock, when he gaed away to douk in Commonside loch. “It is a hard matter,” says Jock to himself, “that a’ the lave o’ Commonside’s men can swatter and swim in the loch like sae mony drakes but me. I am fain either to poutter about the side, or down I gang. I can neither sink nor swim; for when I try to get to the bottom to creep, there I stick like a woundit paddock, wagging my arms and my legs, and can neither get to the top nor the bottom. Just half way, there stick I. But I’s be even hands wi’ them an’ mair, an’ then I’ll laugh at the leishest o’ them; for I’ll stand, and wade, and gang ower the waves afore them a’, aye, and that wi’ my head boonmost.” Jock, after this grand contrivance, coudna rest, but off he sets to Hawick, and gets four big blawn bladders; and the next day, when a’ the lave went to bathe, Jock he went to bathe amang the rest; and he gangs slyly into a bush by himsel’, and ties twa o’ the bladders to every foot. “Now,” thinks Jock, “I’ll let them see a trick.” Sae he slips into the loch, and wades into the deep, but the bladders they aye gart him hobble and bob up and down, till, faith, he loses the balance, and ower he coups. Nane o’ them kend o’ Jock’s great plan, and they were a’ like to burst their sides wi’ laughing when they saw Jock diving. But when they saw he wasna like to come up again, they swattered away to the place, and there was Jock swimming wi’ his head straight to the bottom, and his feet and the four bladders walking a minuay aboon. Now, let me tell ye, an ye lippen to the friar’s warlockry, and his enchantments, and divinations, ye trust to as mony bladders fu’ o’ wind, and down gae a’ your heads, and your heels uppermost. Na, na; nane maun try to cope wi’ auld Michael.’

‘I hae heard, indeed, that he coudna brook ony rivalry,’ said Charlie; ‘and I hae heard waur instances, and waur stories too, than that o’ yours, laird. But let us draw slyly near to the twasome, and make lang lugs, to try if we can learn ony mair about that same beuk. If the friar hae ony power o’ enchantment, it is my opinion the first glamour he’ll thraw will be ower that bonny wench.’

‘We ought to keep them asunder by force,’ said the poet; ‘it would be a shame and a disgrace to us, if we were to let the auld rogue seduce either her person or her morals.’

‘Morals?’ said Charlie; ‘I dinna ken about them, for I watna weel what they are; but as to seducing hersel’, I think I could answer for auld Roger

the friar. I see there's nae man can help liking a bonny lass; but the better a good man likes ane he'll be the mair sweer to do her ony skaith.'

'Aye; but then how can an enchanter be a good man?' said the poet.

'That's the thing that puzzles me,' said Charlie: 'Let us hear what they are on about sae briskly now.'

They then drew near, and heard the following words, while the remarks that they made were said aside among themselves.

'My fate, you see, has been a strange one, father. I was separated from my parents so young that I scarcely remember them. But the Scots have been kind to me, and I have loved them. I have never been unhappy, except when long confined to a place, which I dislike exceedingly; and as I have hopes that this change will add somewhat to my freedom, I rejoice in it, without weighing circumstances. If those fond hopes should be realised, I promise to you, father, that the first use I will make of my liberty, shall be to sit at your feet, and learn that wonderful and mysterious book.'

'Do you hear that?' said the poet with great emphasis, but in a half whisper; 'he has gotten her broken already to learn the book of the black art. Then the deil's bargain and witchcraft comes next; then the harassing of the whole country side, dancing in kirkyards, and riding on the wind; and then, mayhap, the stake and the faggot end the matter that is but just beginning. Alak, and wo is me! I say, in the king's name, and in the warden's let them be separated.'

'Gude sauf us!' exclaimed Charlie: 'There's nae man sure o' his life an a' this be true! But a' fair play. Nae self amang us. Hist, and let us hear what he is saying in answer.'

'Daughter,' said the friar, half crying with joy, 'doth not my heart yearn over thee, even as a mother yearneth over the child of her bosom? Lo, I will be unto thee as a father, and thou shalt be unto me as a daughter.'

'Hear what the old rascal is saying!' said the poet.

'And behold the fruits of our labours shall spring up into life –;'

'Oh, this is past all sufferance!' said the poet.

'– For, O thou fair one, whose beauty is as the beauty of the morning, and whose innocence surpasseth that of the kid, or the lamb, or the young roe, when they are playing upon the mountains –'

'Gude faith, Mr Carol,' said Charlie aside, 'it's that auld chap that's the poet, an' no you.'

‘Humph! mere fustian!’ said the poet.

The friar still went on: –

‘– That beauty will decay, as the rose fadeth on the brows of Shinar or Hermon; and that innocence shall be perverted by the sinful and regardless people among whom thou sojournest, and shall become, as it were, betrothed to sin and corruption; yea, and that eye, that shineth like the dews of the morning, shall be darkened. But, O beloved maiden! there is that in this little book, yea, I say unto thee, even in this old, neglected, and despised book, that, unto those who learn it, shall prove the saviour of life unto life; and if thou dost learn and cherish the things contained in this book thou shalt never die!’

‘Ay, billy, that is a yanker!’ said Tam aside: ‘When ane is gaun to tell a lie, there’s naething like telling a plumper at aince, and being done wi’t.’

‘Now, but hear to the deceitful old rogue,’ said the poet: ‘All the books of black art in the world cannot accomplish that. In the name of Saint Barnabas, I say let them be separated!’

‘It wad be weel done,’ said Tam, ‘if ane durst –;’ for he wanted to blow up the poet’s wrath, for the sake of a little sport.

‘Durst!’ said the poet, ‘durst! – If none other dare, I shall, in spite of all his hellish arts. Durst! that is a good one – to be dursted with an old sackbut!’

They did not hear what answer Delany made to the extraordinary information, as they took it, that, by learning the little black book, she was to be redeemed from death; for the fierce jealousy of the enamoured bard prevented them. But when they listened again so as to hear distinctly, the friar was still increasing in fervency. All that he said was in raptures of divine ecstacy; while his associates, who knew nothing, and cared as little about these things, understood it in another way.

‘For I say unto thee, if thou wilt suffer me to instil these truths into thee, thou shalt both blossom and bring forth fruit abundantly; yea, thou shalt shine as the stars in the firmament of heaven. Seest thou yon sun that walketh above the clouds in majesty and brightness? Beyond yon sun shall thine habitation be fixed; and the blue arch that encircles the regions of the air, which thou hast so often seen studded over with diamonds, shall be unto thee a pavement whereon thou shalt tread. All this and more shalt thou possess, if thou wilt learn and obey the things that are written in this book,

where it is said by one that cannot err, ‘Lo, I will be always with you, and my arms shall be underneath and around you, and when you are faint and weary I will hide you in my bosom.’

‘For the blood that is in your body dare to attempt such a thing!’ cried the enraged poet. ‘Down with hypocrisy and sensuality together! Hurray for the combat, and God defend the right!’

So, crying as loud as he could yell, he pulled out his sword, and rode furiously up between Delany and the friar, shoving the latter rudely as he passed. The maiden’s palfrey sprung away, but the friar’s mule only leaned with all his might to the poet’s steed as he pressed against him in passing; and feeling his prop give way, he leaned round in the same direction, till his tail was exactly where his head was before; and then, dreading some abhorred exertion, he set his feet asunder, and stood immovable. The poet drew up, and wheeled about, and seeing still the hinder parts of the friar and his beast, he cried, exultingly, ‘Ay, you are more ready to seduce an innocent and lovely maiden, than to answer for the crime! Vile lump of sin and hypocrisy! turn round and meet me face to face, that I may chastise thee for thy graceless attempt!’

The friar spurred most furiously, but the mule only dashed his head downward and his heels in a contrary direction, and kept his position. All the rest were like to burst with laughter, which still increasing the bard’s insolence, he fumed about enchantments and the black art, and dared the friar to turn and look him in the face.

What with one provocation, what with another, the friar’s angry passions were roused; and, not being able to make his mule turn round, he drew out his sword, saying at the same time in a voice of great vehemence, ‘God do so to me and more also, if I make not—’

He got no farther with his speech, for the mule interrupted him. Obstinate as the brute was, the sight of the sword, and the sound of his master’s angry voice operated on him like magic. Perhaps he understood that all further opposition was vain – for in one moment he wheeled around, his eyes gleaming with rage; and pricking up his ears to see where the storm of his and his master’s wrath was to alight, he perceived the poet on his tall steed, brandishing his dazzling sword, and forthwith darted at them with the swiftness of an arrow, and a fury not to be checked. There were no more words nor threatenings passed between the enraged combatants; for more

space of time there was none before the mule had his shoulder to that of the poet's steed, his teeth fixed in his flank, and was pushing with the fury of an enraged bull.

On the closing of the two steeds the riders likewise engaged, the poet coming on with a downward stroke, which the friar received with great indifference on his sword crossed above his cowl. But knowing well the nature of his beast, he kept up the poet's sword and arm both, until the sides of the two animals were jammed together, as the rider of the mule well knew they would be. By that time the poet's arm was pressed up straight by his ear, and his sword pointed to heaven; and in endeavouring to free his elbow from the hilt of the friar's sword, he lost his balance. At the same instant their feet encountering in the stirrups, and the friar's being below that of his opponent, he gave him such a ketch with his right foot and sword-arm together, that he made him fly from his horse to a great distance, in a sort of arching direction; and the unfortunate poet, falling on his shoulder and head, was wofully bruised, and utterly discomfited.

But the combat ended not here. The mule still struggled with his adversary, which not only kept his ground, but rather began to force the mule to give way. But the inveterate mongrel was not to be vanquished in that way. He pressed, struggled, and wrought himself round, till he got his tail to the horse's shoulder, and then he attacked him furiously with his iron-heels. The horse being a horse of spirit, and scorning to yield to his long-eared adversary, applied the same offensive weapons with very little ceremony, wincing and screaming all the while, and sometimes making his feet to fly as high as the friar's elbows. The mule fought with desperate energy, but in profound silence. Not so the rider; he spurred, struck with his sword, and cried with a loud voice, 'Soh! tproo! thou beast of the pit! sure the spirit of the evil one is in thee! Lo, I shall be beaten to pieces, for the heels of the horses are lifted up against me. By the life of Pharaoh, I will smite thee until thy blood shall be poured out like water – thou perverse and abominable beast! I say unto thee go forward!'

The voice of the friar, during this passionate declamation, had arisen gradually until the last sentence, which was pronounced in his utmost stile of vehemence. The mule heard this, and saw the uplifted sword; and not awaiting its descent, he sprang forward with main force, but no man will guess the issue.

It may well be conceived, that during this desperate combat between the horse and mule, the onlookers were convulsed with laughter. Charlie Scott, in particular, laughed with a ‘Ha-ha-ha!’ so loud that he made all the woods around to ring, and at every breath exclaimed, ‘Gude faith, I never saw ought half so grand! Na, never!’ Gibbie was advanced a little before the rest, so as to be near the scene of action, which, without doubt, was bringing him in mind of some excellent story, for his mouth was formed like a seam from the one ear to the other. But it is dangerous putting one’s self too forward in life, and that the poor laird of the Peatstacknowe soon found. It is well known that between parties so closely connected as the horse and his rider, passion begets passion. The mule, driven altogether furious by the broil, and the rage and spurs of his master, either wished to rub himself rid of him, or deemed that it was to be a battle general; for he no sooner rushed from one fray than he flew to another, quite open-mouthed on Gibbie, and, seizing him by the thigh, he separated one limb of his buffskin breeches and a mouthful of the laird’s own skin from their places, in one moment, and the next had his teeth fixed in the flank of the laird’s horse. Gibbie cried out against the friar, irritated by pain, as well as the awkward and dangerous situation in which he was thus momently placed. His horse flung – the mule returned the compliment with hearty good will, and glad was Gibbie to escape, which he did with great celerity as soon as he got leisure to use the spurs. The mule ran straight at the next horse, and then at the next again, but all of them scampered off at his approach, and left him master of the field; on which he turned two or three times sullenly round, throwing himself up behind and down before. The friar’s wrath was somewhat diverted by the shouts of laughter from his scattered compeers, and he only smiled grimly as he said to his contumacious beast – ‘Thou art even a perverse and an evil one; nevertheless thou hast been to me a beast for these many years, and hast borne me in distant pilgrimages, through many perils and dangers; and I will not act the part of the son of Bosor: peradventure thou mayest amend thy ways and do some credit to old age.’

The laird in his escape gallopped by the forlorn poet; who, raising up his head, and perceiving the plight of the dismayed and unoffensive wight, scouring off with the one thigh naked and bleeding, burst out into a hysteric giggle between laughing and crying, and repeated some scraps of old rhyme no way connected with the incident. The attention of the party was now

turned to him, and the friar's as much as any, who enquired with great simplicity, 'My brother, why was thine arm lifted up against me?'

The bard was dreadfully abashed, and out of countenance; and he only answered in rhymes, of which none of them could make any thing:

'His arm was strong, and his heart was stout,
And he broke the tower and he got out;
Then the king he was an angry man,
And an angry man was he,
And he said, 'Go, lock him in prison strong,
And hunger him till he dee.

'That was a hard weird, was it not? Ha-ha! there be many such; for

'He had his wale of seven sisters,
  Of lith, and lire, and limb so fair
But the loathly dame of the Hazelrig,
  She ruined his peace for evermair.'

'Lo, my son,' answered the friar, 'thy thoughts are wandering in a wilderness. I only ask thee wherein I have offended thee. For as mine hand is, so is mine heart; and, as my soul liveth, I know not in what respect I have done thee wrong.'

'I have not done thee wrong, fair May,
  I have not done thee wrong,
But the cup of death has passed my lips,
  And my life will not be long.

'No, no; dame Delany, you need not bathe my temples. I am not raving. I am not even hurt. The mischievous beast made my horse throw me, but I am nothing the worse.'

The friar, not being able to make any thing of the poet himself, applied to the rest, and was soon informed by Tam, that 'he was overheard trying to gar the lassie learn the black art, and courting her to nae good; and the poet grew jealous, and was for being revenged.'

The friar uttered a loud groan for the ignorance of his associates; but, hopeless of making any thing of them at such a period, he only began to moralise in a general manner. The poet was again gotten to mount; and shortly after they reached the ancient town of Selkirk, where they halted and refreshed themselves at the monastery of the Cistertians. There the laird got his wound dressed, and his dilapidated robes refitted; and that same evening the party reached the castle of Aikwood, the residence of the celebrated wizard Master Michael Scott.

CHAPTER 13

He was a base and a cruel knight,
  As ever my two eyes did see;
And all that he did, and all that he said,
  It was by the might of glamourye.

But yet his gear was o' the goude
  As it waved and wampished in the wind;
And the coal-black steed he rode upon,
  It was fleeter than the bonny hind.

Ballad of Sir Colin Brand

The distance from Melrose to the castle of Aikwood being only about nine English miles, our party came in view of it before sun-set. It was one of those dead calm winter evenings, not uncommon at that season, when the slightest noise is heard at a distance, and the echoes are all abroad.

As they drew near to the huge dark-looking pile, silence prevailed among them more and more. All was so still that even that beautiful valley seemed a waste. There was no hind whistling at the plough; no cattle nor sheep grazing on the holms of Aikwood; no bustle of servants, kinsmen, or their grooms, as at the castles of other knights. It seemed as if the breath of the enchanter, or his eye, had been infectious, and had withered all within its influence, whether of vegetable, animal, or human life. The castle itself scarcely seemed to be the abode of man; the massy gates were all locked; no porter was in attendance; and there was only one small piping smoke issuing from one of the turrets.

'Gude faith! callans,' said Charlie, 'that's a douth and an awsome looking bigging. I wish we were fairly in, and safely out again.'

'Is that now to be my residence, Yardbire?' said the beautiful Delany. 'Will you go away, and leave Elias and me in that frightsome and desolate looking mansion?'

‘If the great Master gie us a civil answer,’ said Charlie, not well wotting what to say – ‘and desire to have you for his handmaiden, or rather the mistress of his castle, to overlook the other maids, and the spinning and weaving concerns like, then we have orders to leave you. But, if he should be cross, and crabbit, and paughty wi’ us, ye’re in gude hands, and we’ll no quat wi’ you sae easily.’

‘Thou art in good hands indeed,’ said the friar: ‘But, alas! what is man! a flower of the field that the hand of the mower cutteth down and leaveth to decay: A shadow; a sound that passeth away and is not. But, maiden, thou art in better hands than ours; in hands that will not leave the innocent and guiltless to perish. There is an arm around thee that thou seest not: there is a guardian with a sword behind thee and before thee, of whom thou art not aware. Therefore have thou no fear, for no evil shall befal thee.’

‘Methinks I could live any where, and be void of fear, if but suffered to be in your presence,’ said Delany: ‘There is something in what you have told me that goes to my heart, and on it I think I can rely.’

‘Blessed be thou, my daughter!’ said he; ‘yea, and blessed shalt thou be in thy generation—’

‘Hear to that!’ said the poet aside: ‘Still on one subject! It is all over with some body!’

‘– But thou art perhaps going into a place of danger, and evil things may await thee. Here, take thou this, and keep it in thy bosom; and, by the blessing of the Holy Virgin, it shall shield thee from all malevolent spirits, all enchantments, and all dangers of the wicked one; the time may come when thou shalt more thoroughly understand the great things contained in this book.’

As he said this, he put into her hand a small gilded copy of the Four Evangelists, which she kissed and put into her bosom. All the rest saw this, and took it for a book of the Black Art.

By this time they were drawing near to the gate at Aikwood, where all continued silent and still as formerly. Notwithstanding of this, Charlie’s horse, Corby, began to cock his ears and snort in a terrible manner. Stout-hearted as Charlie was, his countenance began to alter; but he uttered not a word farther than coaxing Corby to proceed. The mule leading the way altogether regardless, the horses jogged on after him, example going farther than precept, whether with man or beast. All the horses were, however,

become restive, though none of them was half so fierce as Corby. He continued to force down his head, as if smelling the ground; anon capering and snuffing the air, snorting aloud, and moving with an elasticity rather like a thing of spirit than of joints and bones. ‘Gude faith, Corby, my man,’ said Charlie, as he patted his mane, ‘a’ isna right here! Wend on, ye camstairy thief: what the deil ails ye? But, gude sauf us! ane should take care wha they name here. They say, an speak o’ the deil he’ll appear.’

The old proverb had scarcely left Charlie’s lips, when, all at once, they beheld three pages in black livery standing ranged before the gate, although the moment before there was no living creature there. They seemed to have arisen out of the ground, and as they rose they bowed their heads in a sarcastic way to the embassy. The appearance of the pages, and the motion that they made were both accomplished in the same moment of time, and at the motion every one of the horses broke away, like so many scared wildfowl, some one way, and some another. Charlie tried to restrain Corby with the whole might of his capacious arm; but the impatient animal plunged and bounded into the air with such violence, that his rider was obliged to give him head, and away he sprung like a roe over field and river, straining every nerve to be out of sight of Aikwood, while Charlie’s warrior cloak, that hung only by the shoulder clasp, flapped so far behind him that he appeared like a black cloud skimming the valley. Though none of the other horses made equal speed with Corby, every one ran as fast as it could, and all to the eastward, though far asunder.

The mule, on the contrary, never moved nor concerned himself about the matter. He indeed held forward his long ears, and took a serious look of the pages, as of some sort of beings he did not more than generally understand. Nevertheless he despised them, and looked about with apparent astonishment and derision at the madness and folly of his associates. The friar, finding himself left with his mule and the three pages thus unaccountably, began to address the latter; but they only imitated his motions, and made wry faces, without returning him any answer. The mule had by this time taken another serious look at them, and disliking them exceedingly, he sidled towards them with all his mettle, and tried to hit them with his heels. The urchins then raised such an eldritch laugh that they made the arches of the castle to ring, and, skipping about and about, provoked the mule to farther violence. He, on his part, was nothing loth to

attack; he ran open-mouthed at one, kicked at another, and tried to crush another up against the gate, all to the great annoyance of the friar, who, with the utmost difficulty kept his seat for a good while, in spite of the mad evolutions of his provoked and provoking beast. But the game once begun was not suffered to subside. The giggling elves, with the swiftness of lightning, skipped about, and, in whatever direction the mule darted, one of them was always pricking him behind. The worthy friar waxed very wroth, and swore by the life of Pharaoh that he would execute vengeance on them. But the noise of mirth and mischief waxed louder and louder, until the austere inmates of the castle heard; and the great Master said to his only attendant, 'Gourlay, what is the meaning of all this uproar?'

'It is only Prig, Prim, and Pricker,' said he, 'making sport with a mendicant friar and his ass.'

'Are they killing him?' enquired his Master, with the greatest composure, and without lifting his eyes from a large book that lay before him.

'I wot not, sire,' said Gourlay, with the same indifference.

'Ay, it is no matter,' returned the Master; 'It will keep them in employment a little while.'

'Perhaps,' said Gourlay – and retired back to the casement with sullen step.

By this time the mule had become so outrageous, that he wheeled, kicked, and plunged, like one of the furies; and, at the last, in spite of all the friar could do, laid him fairly on his back, amid the frantic shrieks and gibberish of his tormentors. Gourlay beheld the incident from the crevice of the turret, and, not daring to discompose the great Master, he walked down to the gate to witness the sport at a shorter distance; though with a callous indifference about the matter, and without the least hope to enjoy it.

When he came nigh to the scene of action, he looked as if he expected the friar to have been dead, and was rather astonished when he saw him raise his head, and utter a solemn anathema against the pages, who fled back as if awed and overcome. The seneschal not comprehending this, turned his pale glazed cheek toward the friar, elevated his brow as if looking at the verge of the high hill beyond the river, and stood motionless, stealing a side glance, now and then, of the stranger.

The latter raised up his gruff face, inflamed with passion, and, seeing the tall ungainly figure of Gourlay standing like a statue, with a red turban on

his head, and a grey frock or mantle, that in ample folds covered him from the neck to the sandals, took him at once for the mighty enchanter, and addressed him with as little respect as might be.

‘If thou art the lord of this mansion, draw near unto me, that I may tell thee of the deeds of thy servants, which eat thy bread, and stand at thy gate. Lo, have they not lifted up the hand against my life, who am a stranger, and a servant of him against whom thou hast rebelled and lifted up the heel? Go to; thou art a churl, and a derision, and a byeword among thy kindred and people, and not worthy to be called by their name. I came unto thy gate in peace, on a message of peace, and the words of peace were in my mouth; and why hast thou suffered these children of the wicked one to maltreat and abuse me? Why dost thou not open thy mouth?’

The pages chattered with a malicious laugh at a distance, and the seneschal came stalking near, in a sort of confused astonishment, to take a nearer view of this talking phenomenon. He came and looked over him without altering a muscle of his face; and the friar, irritated by pain and the contempt shewn toward his sufferings, went on. At any other time he would haply have been chilled by the pale frigid countenance, shagged beard, and glazed unearthly eye that were now bent over him; but in the present state of his feelings he disregarded them; and, though convinced that he spoke to the mighty enchanter himself, continued his harangue: –

‘Come thou near unto me that I may curse thee. Thou child of all unrighteousness, art thou not already cursed among the children of men? Where are the wealth and the cheerfulness, where are the welcome, and the faces of joy and mirth, that are to be met with at the houses of thy kinsmen whose bread I eat? Where the full basket and the welcome store? the wine that giveth its colour in the glass? the sounds of mirth and gladness? the sounds of the song, the viol, and the harp? And where is thy tongue, that thou canst not speak?’ cried the friar, elevating his voice to its highest and most impatient tones.

‘Humph,’ said Gourlay.

‘Humph!’ returned the friar; ‘What dost thou mean by humph? Tell me, in one word, Art thou the lord of this castle?’

‘No; but his seneschal,’ said Gourlay. ‘What hast thou to say?’

‘Then lead me to thy master, that I may see him face to face, and tell him the words of him that sent me. I will not be afraid of these dogs of thine and

thy master's. What is become of thy tongue that thou dost not speak? Tell me, I say, can I see thy master?'

'Perhaps,' said Gourlay; and, seizing the friar by the shoulder with a rude but powerful grasp, he dragged him in at the gate.

'With-hold thine hand, and thy unmannerly grasp,' said the friar – 'else I will smite thee with the sword.'

The seneschal regarded this threat only with a grim unmeaning smile; and as he held the friar by the right arm so firmly that he even lost the power of it, it was impossible for him to draw his sword.

'Nay but hearken unto me,' continued he; 'surely it is better for thee to live than to die. Therefore bring in my beast that he may have provender; and let me also bring my goods and my changes of raiment along with me in peace, else how shall I set up my face before thy master?'

The seneschal then paused, and motioned with his hand to the pages to bring the panniers; they ran to obey, but as soon as any of them touched the huge wallet, he hastened back and fell to the ground.

'Vermin! cannot you bring the furniture?' cried Gourlay.

They shook their heads, and stood at a distance.

'Humph!' said he, 'I do not comprehend this,' and leading the friar back, still holding him fast by the arm, he suffered him to lift the panniers himself, which he did with good will, and then allowed himself to be led away by the uncourteous seneschal, who said to the pages as he departed, 'See to the vile animal!'

Without more ado he led the friar in, and pushing him rudely into a small vaulted apartment, he locked first a ponderous iron door, and then a massy wooden one, full of nails, upon him; and, without regarding his complaints or anathemas, or deigning a word in reply to his queries, he left him to his own bitter reflections.

The apartment at first appeared to be dark, but on looking about he found that there were two grated loop-holes in it, and by the light from these he soon perceived that there was nothing in the place save the skeleton of a man of uncommon stature and dimensions. The bones were lying flat on the floor, every one in its place exactly as the man had died, and the flesh wasted away from them. No disarrangement had taken place, nor was the smallest joint wanting. This was a petrifying sight to the poor friar, who,

crossing himself, and turning from the horrible spectacle, set his nose through the grating and looked out on the fields.

The first thing he beheld confounded him more than all he had ever seen in his life. The three devilish pages were tampering with his mule to bring him within the outer gate; but he, in his usual manner, proved as refractory as ever, and laid about him with all his might. On this, the boys in one moment whipped him up in their arms, and ere the friar could draw his breath, far less utter a Pater-Noster, they set him down in the middle of the court, straight before the friar's grating, and tied him to the shaft of a well with a strong rope. The friar said a Benedicite; and, ere he had done, the devilish and provoking imps began to torment the poor mule beyond all sufferance, whipping him round and round the post, and making him fling and jump till the blood and sweat were pouring together from his branded sides, and he was no more able to resent the injuries committed on him. The friar fumed, and threatened, and cursed them in the name of the blessed saints; but they only laughed him to scorn: And when the mule could no longer resent the lash, they brought red-hot spindles and pushed them between his hind-legs, which made him fling and rear till he fell down at the post, and lay groaning, unable any more to move.

The thing that provoked the friar worst of all was the sight of the tall seneschal standing looking on, and seeming, by his motions, to be directing the game. Never was such a flood of eastern eloquence heard at Aikwood, as was poured from the small crevice in the bottom of the eastern turret that evening. No one, however, regarded it, or, if they did, it was only to mock or mimic the sublime deprecator.

To all that he said, the seneschal grinned a smile of grim disdain, and motioned to the pages to redouble their sport, which they did, till, as said, the poor animal could furnish them with no more.

The friar now beheld a joyful sight through the twilight, the rest of his companions coming on foot towards the gate. They had gathered together at the mill, about a mile to the eastward of the castle, and made another attempt to approach it on horseback; but their efforts were vain; not a steed would come one step farther than just in view of it; so they agreed to put their horses up at the mill, leaving them in charge of the miller and his two sons, and to proceed on foot to the castle, to join their mysterious associate

the friar, whose magical might some of them began to dread, and others to trust.

Gourlay beheld them approaching as well as did the friar, and again waited on the great Master with awe and trembling.

‘I pray thee, mighty Master, to forgive me,’ said he, ‘but too true is it that the wretched pedagogue has said – for here come a body of the warden’s friends, with swords in their hands, and one beautiful human thing in their company.’

‘And what then?’ said Michael, in a stern, hollow voice.

The seneschal trembled. ‘I – I – only want to know how they are to be received,’ said he.

‘Received?’ cried the Master, raising his voice to a pitch that made the old wretch shrink as it were within himself. ‘Received? As spies should, to be sure. Begone!’

Gourlay ran cowering toward the door.

‘Stop –. Come back here. What forces are in the castle?’

‘What forces? Hem! Great Master, you only know.’

‘Any things of flesh, I inquire?’

‘No, not one; if you except the old witch Henbane. Oh! I beg your pardon, great and honoured master! I meant your worthy and respectable housekeeper.’

Michael gave three gentle tramps with his heel, and in one moment the three pages in black livery, Prig, Prim, and Pricker, were at his knee.

‘Work, Master, work. What work now?’ said they all in one breath.

‘Give your master there a toasting for his insolence,’ said Michael.

The pages giggled for joy; the seneschal kneeled and roared out for mercy, and, as a motive for granting it to him, said the strangers were at the gate. The pages had already laid their fangs on him; but the Master, on the arrival of the strangers being brought to his mind, ordered the imps to desist. This they did on the instant; but, without delay, rushed on Michael himself, as if they would tear him to pieces. He threatened, cursed, and dared them to touch him; but they seemed nothing daunted by all he said, but danced around him with demoniac gestures, crying still out with one voice:—

‘Work, Master, work; work we need;

Work for the living, or for the dead:
Since we are called, work we will have,
For the master, or for the slave.
Work, Master, work. What work now?'

'Miserable wight that I am!' cried the mighty Master. 'Then, d—d dwarfs, since it must be so, bring the slave back, and let him have three varieties, and no more.'

Gourlay had made his escape with all expedition, but it was not long ere they overtook him, and brought him back, leading him in the most grotesque manner that can well be conceived. They then began to twirl him about, first with his face one way and then another; and, latest adventures making the strongest impressions on their wicked imaginations, by some devilish slight they transformed him into the shape of a mule, and practised on him all the wanton cruelties they had so lately done on the friar's, seeming to enjoy the sport all the while with redoubled zest. They next changed him into a dog; and, tying a cannister, containing some small stones to his tail, they pursued him round and round the room, and finally out into the yard, with long whips, every one breaking at him, and giving him a lash as he came by. This caused him always now and then to exert himself with such speed that the cannister was sometimes hitting him on the head with a loud rattling yerk, sometimes on the back, and all over the body, while the poor steward was running, yelping in the uttermost desperation. The friar beheld part of the sport from his grate, but little wist that it was the hated seneschal that was suffering, else he would have doubtless enjoyed the scene in no ordinary degree. The rest of the embassy also saw it from the outer gate, where they now stood rapping and calling without being regarded, the pages being too intent on their game to pay the least attention to such as they.

'Let alane the poor tike, like good lads,' cried muckle Charlie, 'and come and open the yett. What ill has the silly beast done to you?'

'They bring me in mind o' Jock Harper's terriers,' said Gibbie, 'that wad rather do ill for the sake o' doing it, than do ought that was good or right for a' the warld.'

'I hate to see a colley-shangie,' said the poet; 'there is nothing sublime or romantic in it.'

‘They’re nae canny couts thae three chaps,’ said Charlie; ‘Corby wadna look at them, and he kens things gayan weel. We maun just hae a wee patience till they be done wi’ their chace. It’s a queer kind o’ place this.’

The poor metamorphosed steward, finding no rest for the sole of his foot, betook him again to the staircase, and crept down at his master’s feet, deeming the chastisement to have been over. But he was no sooner there than the pages were after him, and by the time they had whirled him three times about, he started up a hare, and the three pages, turning themselves into colley dogs set all upon him.

With the form of every quadruped into the shape of which he was turned, he seemed to acquire its nature and antipathies, and in none was it so striking as in the hare. When the collies began to snap at him, his terror is not to be imagined; he darted round and round the hall like lightning, breaking out and in to Michael’s study, to the great disarrangement of his conjuring apparatus, books, and papers; while every time that a colley sprung with open mouth at him, he uttered a desperate scream.

This was the only one of their frolics that appeared to amuse the great Master, his partiality for the sports of the chase being proverbial to this day. When he saw the old seneschal laying back his long ears, and exerting his powers of speed in such manifest terror, and the malignant collies whinking after him, and waylaying him in every strait, making him often spring aloft, he could not help laughing outright, and baiting the dogs on him. The tears stood in the old hare’s eyes when he heard this, nevertheless his fright made him agile; he bolted from the halls and alleys of the castle into the extensive yard; and there was such a hunt! Michael and the friar both ran to their respective windows to see the sport, and our party at the outer gate shouted and hallooed with great energy. Many a time did the dogs get a snap at the steward, and make him scream out, while all the onlookers laughed aloud. At length, thinking he would actually be worried, he cleared the wall, and made a bold effort to gain the wood. But these were a trio of dogs from which there was no possibility of escape. Ran he fast or ran he slow, there were they after him, snatching at his hips and panting sides, and yelping so keenly all the while that the seneschal had no doubt of being torn in pieces should they fairly seize him. They turned him, and made him trace many an acute angle on the hill, while our party were running after him, throwing always sticks or stones at the steward, as he hasted by them, and baiting the

dogs on him. Finding, as formerly, no other resource, he returned with main speed to the castle, and crept down at the Master's feet, who, with one touch of his divining rod, changed him into his own native forbidding form.

He started up in great wrath; and, though panting so that he could scarcely speak, swore a horrible oath, that he would no longer be kept in bondage and maltreated in that manner; and that, since it was impossible for him to escape in any other way, he would cut his own throat, and ruin his chance of an after life.

'Poor dastardly braggart!' said Michael; 'not for the soul that inhabits that old malicious frame, dare you do such a thing. I would seize on it, and make sport of it for ages. I have you wholly in my power, and, dead or alive, it is the same thing to me. Were you to do as you say, and take away your life by a ghastly wound, I could even make one of these fiendish spirits enter into your body, reanimate it, and cause you to go about with your gaping wound, unclosed and unpurified, as when death entered thereat. Think of what an existence that would be, and then go and put your miserable threat into execution.'

'Hah! There it is!' said Gourlay: 'Turn me as I will, I see nothing but wretchedness. Cursed be the day that I saw you, and ten times cursed the confession I made, that has thus subjected me to your tyranny! However, use me another day as you have used me on this, and you do it at your peril, if you were the devil himself. I have warned you.'

Michael only smiled contemptuously at the threat; and again asked what living creatures were in the castle, as he wanted a retinue to receive the message of his kinsmen.

'I have told you already,' said Gourlay, in the same passionate and irritated mood; 'and I again repeat it, that there is no mortal thing in the castle, but the old witch, and perhaps two or three hundred rats.'

'Take that in the first place then,' said Michael, 'for your impertinence' – at the same time laying him flat on the floor by a tremendous blow, although he only moved his hand toward the steward; 'and in the next place go call out these three hundred rats you talk of, marshal them up in the court, and receive the mighty warden's people with all manner of pomp and respect, and use them according to their demerits.'

The steward roared out with pain; and gnashing his teeth with rage, he arose growling, and was hasting away, when the Master asked him if he was

going to accomplish what he had bidden him do.

‘Without doubt;’ said he, ‘Is it not very likely that I shall be able?’

‘Take that then,’ said the Master, ‘and put it above the lock-hole of the door; it shall serve you as a summons, and Prig, Prim, and Pricker shall marshal your array.’ With that he gave him a small piece of parchment written in red characters, which the steward snatched angrily out of his hand, and going down the stair did as the Master had ordered him.

The charm was effective, and its effects momentary. The bustling and the screaming of rats were heard in every corner of the castle, and forthwith a whole column of men marched out into the court in three files, led by the three pages, and headed by the incensed seneschal in his grey mantle and cap.

Our messengers looked mightily astonished when they beheld such a retinue, and Charlie observed that ‘it was a confounded shame for Mr Michael no to join the warden, and had sae mony idle men lying tholing starvation beside him.’ But then looking wildly around on both sides to his friends, he added, ‘God’s grace be about us! wha kens but a’ thae may be spirits or elves in the shapes o’ men? I think they hae unco queer musty-like looks. An I had Corby here he wad soon tell me wi’ a vengeance.’

Old Gourlay, now at the head of his corps, demanded what the strangers wanted; and on being informed who they were, and that they came on a special commission to the Master, they were admitted, and walked up a lane between two ranks of armed men in full caparison.

The Master beheld them from his casement, and was mightily diverted by the whimsical appearance of the various individuals that formed the group, two of whom he conceived to be the most beautiful creatures he had ever seen. Whoever reads this will at once guess who these two lovely beings were; but if he does, he will at once guess wrong. It would seem that a wizard sees every thing in this fair and beautiful creation through an inverted medium, and that all the common and fine feelings of nature are in him changed and distorted. The beauty of the two young captives appeared, in Michael’s eyes, hateful, and even affected him with loathing; but two more lovely and engaging creatures than Jordan and the Deil’s Tam he had never seen on earth. The hooked nose, wrinkled face, and mouth from ear to ear of the laird, he thought exquisite; but Tam’s long coulter nose, turned up in front, his small grey eyes, and shapeless physiognomy, were beyond all

expression engaging. So, from the time that the Master got the first look of them, he determined, contrary to his usual custom, to see and converse with his guests.

They were soon conducted to the door of the vault, in which their friend the friar was immured; and, as soon as the door opened, he exclaimed, with a loud voice, ‘I charge you, O my brethren, and my companions, that ye come not into this place, nor set a foot within its boundaries; for the place is a place of death, and the bones of the dead men are in it.’

There is no deciding what these words might have produced, had they been pronounced in time; but as soon as Charlie and the laird, who were foremost, heard the friar’s voice, they rushed towards him without thought or fear of the consequences, and, ere he had done, the hindmost were pushed in by the relentless arm of the seneschal, and the iron door closed behind them. Perceiving how matters stood, the friar straight lifted up his hands, and continued to declaim in a still more fervent stile.

‘Hout! Gude Lord, friar man, haud your tongue,’ said Charlie interrupting him: ‘What signifies making sic a frase as a’ this? or what good will it do? I hae run mysel into mony a priminary in my life, but I never fand that mony words did muckle good. I trowed that ye had mair art about ye than to be feared for a stane an’ lime wa,’ an’ twa or three airn staincheons. Pith can do muckle, but art can do mair.’

Charlie meant the black art; but the friar taking him up in another meaning, shook him by the hand and blessed him.

It may not have occurred to the reader and it is not likely it should, that this same friar was an English monk, the most celebrated man of that age, then exiled from his country, and obliged to skulk in disguise, for fear of being apprehended and burnt as a wizard and necromancer. He was the greatest philosopher and chemist of the age, the real inventor of gun-powder, and many other wonderful discoveries, and, withal, a pious and good man – although one whose character was tinctured with peculiarities so striking, that some took him for a man crazed in his mind, but far more for a powerful necromancer. His name is familiar to every man in the least acquainted with the literature or the science of that age; but while he remained in Scotland being always denominated the gospel friar, we have judged it best to call him by that name. If the reader has not discovered this,

it is time he should know it; and whether the friar was a necromancer or not, will appear in the sequel.

When the party got leisure to converse together, their first words were expressive of the astonishment they laboured under at sight of the warlike force kept up by the Master. Charlie only testified his regret that there was not a right and mutual understanding between him and the warden; but the maid Delany was the first to remark that she did not think they were right men, because their faces were all alike, and their eyes were not like the eyes of any human being she had ever before looked on. In this every one present acquiesced, and great was their wonder how or whence that mighty armed force had sprung; but they agreed that there was no contending with such numbers, of whatsoever nature they might be, and that there was nothing for it but submitting to the Master's will.

The day light was by this time quite extinguished, but the moon was up; and it being a hard frost, with a slight covering of snow, or rime, it was nearly as light as some winter days. Their damp, mouldy vault with the grisly skeleton lying at the one side of it, shewed horridly dismal in the wan and shadowy light, and threw a chillness over their hearts. They hoped and looked long for dinner, and then for supper, but neither of them came; nor did they hear or see any living thing all that night, save the friar's mule, that had again got to his feet, and stood at the post groaning and trembling of cold. This was a grievous sight to the friar, for his heart was moved for the sufferings of his poor beast; and in the bitterness of his spirit he vented some anathemas against the unconscionable seneschal, saying – 'Verily if ever that son of Belial fall into my hands, I will be unto him as Adramelech and as Sharezer, and do unto him as they did to the father that begat them.'

Every time that Charlie looked out at the mule, he testified a sort of inward satisfaction that his own trusty steed was not brought into the same scrape, and sundry times said, 'Gude faith, Corby kend better sense than coming into sic a place as this is. He's as weel off down wi' the auld miller; He'll get some pluffins o' seeds or dust, poor fallow. An they gie him but water, I'm no feared for him, for there's plenty o' meat yonder – but he'll never do if they let him want water.'

About two o'clock in the morning the seneschal entered with a light, but had the precaution to lock the wooden door before he opened the iron one. The prisoners had sat down on the floor, and were leaning on one another;

and, dismal as their lodging was, some of them had fallen sound asleep. Delany was leaning on the friar's breast, and the poet had laid himself down behind her, and covered her with his mantle. The rest were huddled together, so that they appeared to be lying above one another; but all, or most of them, set up their heads at the entrance of the steward.

Tam was the first to address him. 'What's come o' our supper, goodman, that you are coming toom-handed? Do you no think it is time your guests had something to eat, or hae ye naething either to eat or drink in this great gousty castle? I dinna care what ye may think, or what you may say; but in my opinion you and your master baith are naething but twa ill-bred unmannerly niggards.'

The seneschal grinned disdain, and clenched his teeth in wrath. He was about to reply, but all their tongues were loosed on him at once, some complaining of one thing some of another, and the friar more particularly of the treatment of his beast. All, however, ended with a request for meat.

'No,' said Gourlay; 'we have no meat for spies and forayers. A halter is the only guerdon we bestow on such dogs. I want this fair maiden, and for the rest of you' – He finished the sentence with a sneer and a point with his finger to the bones; and seizing the maid by the shoulder, he dragged her toward the door.

'Softly sir, and if you please,' said the poet, speaking in pure iambics, and seizing the bars of the iron door before the steward and his prize. 'We have indeed this maiden brought, from distant camp and knight renowned, unto the master of this house; and to none else we give her up: No, not to thee, nor arm of flesh.'

As the poet said these words, he bristled up, and faced the steward at the door, to keep him back; but the carl gave him such a blow on the temples that he staggered and fell. The friar then interposed, and though he was a strong and powerful man, the irascible steward plied his blows so fast and so hard about his bare pate, that he was also overthrown. The maiden screamed; and the old incendiary was within a hairbreadth of having her outside of the iron door, when she would have been wholly out of the power of her friends and protectors. But at that critical instant Charlie Scott seized the steward by the arm, never doubting but that he would twist him like a willow; but he was mistaken. The churl seized him by the throat with his left hand, with such prodigious force that Charlie deemed him to have the

strength of six common men, and lending him a blow on the face, he made his mouth and nose to gush blood. Charlie returned the salute with interest, yet the steward stood his ground, and a most desperate struggle ensued, in which victory appeared doubtful. Gibby perceiving his friend and champion's jeopardy, drew out his sword, and was going deliberately to stick the old ragamuffin behind, had not Charlie called out furiously to him to forbear.

'Keep back your whittle, you cowardly dog,' cried he, 'else I'll cut you into a thousand pieces. I never yet took odds against a man, nor shall I now, unless I am fighting wi' the devil. In that case I may measure my backbreadth on the floor. But be he the devil, be he dicken, I shall gie him ae squeeze.'

Charlie with that closed with his dangerous opponent, and gave him such a squeeze that he made his back and ribs to crash. The steward twisted his face into the most hideous contortions, and exerted his whole force to extricate himself, but Charlie brought him to the ground, falling upon him with all his ponderous weight. It was among the bones of the gigantic skeleton that the two combatants fell; and Charlie, deeming that he had given his foe enough for once, and a little startled to find himself among the rattling bones, began to unloose his grasp, and said in a hurried way, 'Billy, I'll learn you how to strike fo'k on the gab and the brigg o' the nose sae rashly!' and was getting up as fast as he could, when the steward gave him such a blow with the thigh-bone of the dead man, that he had very nigh brought him down again. If Charlie's bonnet had not had a bar or two of steel, that blow would have shattered his skull. As it was it stunned him a little, and made the water start into his eyes; and he had just recollection and strength sufficient to secure his adversary's arms, by holding them down, so that he might not repeat the blow. Yet, with all this Charlie's temper was not to be ruffled. He cared not how often or how much he fought, but he never fought in wrath.

'Gude faith, my man,' said he, 'but ye're no nice o' your chapping sticks! and foul fa' me gin ye dinna lay them gayan freely on. But I dinna blame ye. A wight man never wants a weapon; only come that gate again an ye dare.'

The steward growled and cursed, trying all that he could to throw Charlie from above him, and master him by sheer strength. He had no idea of being

overpowered by a single arm, nor was he wont to fear half a dozen, but he had never met with the like of Charlie Scott before. He might as well have tried to remove the hill of Aikwood; so he was obliged to succumb, which he did with a very bad grace; nor would he either abate one inch in his demand of having the damsel unconditionally, or grant one request that they desired of him.

'Why, then, there's nae help for it, honest man,' said Charlie; 'I hae ye firm and fast, and what ye winna gie us we maun e'en tak at our ain hand. Honest friar, come you here, and tak' a' the keys o' the castle aff this camstary hallanshaker, and we'll e'en help oursels to sic as we can get. I sal tak care that he sanna move a spauld against you, and as for his tongue we maun just let it wag.'

The rage of the seneschal, when he saw himself robbed of the keys of the castle, is not to be described: he cursed and raged in such a manner, that, even after the friar had both doors fairly open, Charlie durst not move from off him, or let him go, for fear of some deadly scaith.

'I dinna ken what I'm to do wi' this deil's buckie,' said he; 'he's like the tod's whelps, that grow aye the langer the waur.'

'I wad gie him a settler,' said Tam.

'He brings me in mind o' a barrel o' beer, fuming and fuffing. He'll no settle till he be pierced,' said Gibbie.

The friar then took up his bulky baggage, and walked out with that and the light, meaning to bring his mule's halter wherewith to bind the seneschal; but Charlie, making his escape from him, locked him in – and thus were our messengers left in the full and free possession of the castle of Aikwood.

CHAPTER 14

The lady looked o’er the castle wa’,
  She looked both pale and wan;
For the door was locked, and the lord within,
  He was no Christian man.

Song of May Marley

When the steward saw that he was fairly mastered, and that neither strength nor words could avail him ought, he remained where he was in sullen silence. He had got no orders from the Master to bring him the maid, but it had come into his head to go and take her to himself, and he had nearly effected his purpose. What might have been the consequence of his success, it is painful even to calculate; but he was thus prevented, though not without blood and wounds.

The guests now traversed all the lower apartments of the castle, there being neither bolt nor bar to interrupt them; but for all the retinue that they had seen at their arrival, there was neither the appearance of man nor beast remaining. The large hall did not seem to have been occupied for a long period. The shelves were empty, and there were neither dishes nor fragments of meat of any description; and every thing within as well as without the castle had the appearance of desolation.

At length they came to a door, from the bottom of which they perceived some light issuing, of which they were glad, as they were afraid the steward’s lamp would fail them and leave them in darkness. Deeming themselves on ticklish ground, they consulted in a whisper before venturing in. Charlie Scott was quite a fearless man among his fellow creatures, but all kinds of supernatural agency pressed heavily on his conscience. Therefore, in the present instance, he dissuaded his comrades from entering, with all his eloquence.

‘Gude faith, callans, keep back off that place. It is maybe the warlock’s room; and gin he should be in the mids o’ some o’ his cantrips at this eiry time o’ the morning, gude sauf us! it is a question what might be the upshot. Na, na, friar; I tell ye, bide back, it is best to let sleeping dogs lye, for fear they get up and bite you.’

But the friar’s creed differed from that of Charlie, and he went dauntlessly forward, putting him aside with his hand, and saying at the same time, that he would ‘surely go in unto him as with a front of brass or of iron;’ that sooner or later the time and the season of their meeting must come, and why should he be dismayed?

The friar then opened the door with caution, and entered, followed by all his associates, Charlie Scott bringing up the rear, and whispering to those next him in a tremulous voice – ‘Od that body’s mad! He’ll lead us into some ill-faur’d snapper. Dinna be ower rash, callans. Just look afore ye.’

Instead of the great enchanter, however, they found only an old woman, so busily engaged with something on the fire, that she scarcely deigned to regard them as they entered. She had a wooden tube, like the barrel of a gun, with which she blew up her fire; and she kept blowing at it till the flame came above the lip of her caldron, and let her see into it; for she had no lamp, nor any other light save that which came from the fire.

When she had made it blaze thus high, she spoke to herself, and without taking her mouth from the tube; saying some words to the following purport: –

‘Sotter, sotter, my wee pan,
To the spirit gin ye can;
When the scum turns blue,
And the blood bells through,
There’s something aneath that will change the man.’

When Charlie saw her unchristian-like face, and heard her mumbling these horrid words through her long hollow tube, he turned his back and fled, taking shelter in a void entrance, to which he was led by some light that fell into it from the rays of the moon. Full hardly was he then bested, for he still deemed that he heard the witch’s rites at a distance; and the faint ray of the moon through a narrow aperture made the rest of the space

appear so shadowy and dim, that Charlie saw he was in a dangerous situation, and actually began to fancy he beheld a face in the dark staring at him, and still coming nearer. It was no time to stand there; so he fled with all his might. But in his dismay he lost every kind of aim, or consideration whither he was going, and at once stumbled on the undermost step of a stone stair. Thinking the apparition he had seen was by that time hard upon him, and no other way that he knew of open for flight, he rose and pursued his course straight up stairs, in a state of perturbation hardly to be accounted for. The first landing place that he came to he ran himself against a door, and not finding farther entrance he faced about, and, leaning over the balluster, he set up such a yell as never was before breathed from lungs. It is true he neither heard nor saw aught of the apparition; but Charlie was a sensible man, and he was certain it might be there for any thing that he knew; so he set up the same kind of cry that he was wont to do when he lost his neighbours in a mist, or in a night foray, only about ten times or so louder.

'Hilloa! Tam Craik! friar! hilloa! d—n ye a'; what for winna ye come wi' a light?'

Charlie was now at such a distance from his comrades, who were still in the witch's small apartment, and the echoes of the huge void castle so confused the sounds, that they took the cries of their captain for the rushing of a whirlwind roaring through the crannies of the castle, and paid no regard to them. No state could be more deplorable than that in which muckle Charlie Scott was now placed. To have returned down the stair would have been meeting the devil face to face; or, as Charlie much better expressed it, 'to hae dabbed nebs wi' the deil.'

He had therefore no other resource than to bellow out for assistance; and seeing none approach, he said aloud in great agony of spirit, 'Lord, gin I were but on Corby's back again! ay, though it were in the wildest glen o' a' the Cheviots, and the Eskdale souple o'er my shoulder,' (that was the cant name of Charlie's tremendous sword;) 'I might then work my way: But sic a place as this I saw never! Od, an there be lugs within the wa's o' the house I shall either gar them hear or crack them – Hilloa!'

Not satisfied with giving yelloch after yelloch, as he termed his loud cries, he flew to every door on the landing place, laid on it with his fists, and kicked it with his foot, calling at each of them in the same key as

before, ‘Is there ony body here?’ He at last prevailed: one door was opened, and he was admitted inside. But, alas for our gallant yeoman! he only by this transition got out of one exceedingly bad scrape into a worse.

These casual separations of *dramatis personae* are exceedingly unfortunate for the story-teller who aims at conciseness and brevity; because it is impracticable to bring them all on at the same time. A story is like a waggoner and his horses travelling out the king’s highway, his machine loaden with various bales of rich merchandise. He goes smoothly and regularly on, till he comes to the bottom of a steep ascent, where he is obliged to leave a great proportion of his loading, and first carry one part of it to the top of the hill, then another, and then another, which retards him grievously on his way. So it is with the writer of a true history such as this; and the separation of parties is as a hill on his onward path.

It is otherwise with dramatic representations, and in these the authors have a great advantage. Let their characters separate as they will, or be engaged as they will, they can at any time, with the greatest ease, be brought together on the stage. The one enters from the one side, and the other from the other, and we do not much concern ourselves how or whence they come, taking it for granted that they are there, and that is enough. It is rather delightful to see a hero, in whom one had begun to take some interest, and whom he supposed to be far distant, exposed to dangers abroad and perfidy at home, all at once stalk majestically in from the side scene, and take his place before our eyes. It gives the heart a great deal of relief to see and know that he is there in person to stand up for his own injured rights. But in our own case there is no such expedient. Like the waggoner, we must return from the top of the hill, and bring up those of our characters that are left behind. At present we must return from the top of the great stair-case in Aikwood castle, into the housekeeper’s cell on the ground floor.

Charlie had made his escape almost unobserved; those next to him weening that he had only drawn a little back to keep a due distance between the witch and him, so that they pressed forward to the scene without regarding him.

The crone continued her orgies, blowing her fire one while, and again stirring the liquid in the caldron; then making it run from the end of a stick, that she might note its state of gelidity. The friar addressed her in his usual stile of sonorous eastern eloquence; but she only regarded him by a slight stare, and a motion with her hand, as if she wished him and his group to disappear. She had taken them for spirits that she had conjured up, and perhaps thought they were come before the time; for in mumbling to herself, they at one time heard her saying, ‘So you are all there, are you? Well, I shall find you work. Sotter, sotter my wee pan.’

This scene went on for a considerable time without any variety, the witch attending solely to her caldron and her fire; the friar standing before the flame, and Tam and Gibbie, with their long kipper noses, peeping over his shoulder. The other three were behind these; the poet with his arm round Delany’s waist, and the beautiful face of the boy Elias, the very picture of amazement personified, appeared below the friar’s right arm. Scarcely could such another group be formed for the painter’s eye. Here sat the witch, haggard and wild, close at the one cheek of the fire, watching over her caldron and infernal morsel with the utmost eagerness. There stood the gruff friar, with the keys of the castle in his right hand, and the dim lamp in his left, raised above his head; so that, from the two groups of light, the marked features of amazement could be distinctly traced; which, with the faint and yellowish hue of their complexions, made the whole highly picturesque.

The witch continued her occupation; till, at length holding up her stick to note the consistence of her jelly, that appeared like boiling blood and water mixed, there was something in its appearance that confounded her. She dropt both her tube and her stirring stick among the ashes, and turned about staring wildly at our group. She appeared as if examining their features one by one in search of some one whose presence she missed; and perceiving the boy’s face below the friar’s arm, she fixed her eyes on that, cowering down at the same time like a cat that is about to spring on its prey. Then, rising half up, she moved toward him in a stooping posture, turning always her face first to the one side and then to the other, until her nose came almost in contact with the boy’s, on which he slipped his face out of her sight behind the friar’s back. Observing next the two droll faces over the friar’s two shoulders, she appeared delighted with the view; and letting her

jaws fall down, she smiled at it, but it was rather a gape than a smile. She then tottered again towards the fire, rocking her body and wagging her head as before, repeating the while this unmeaning phrase:

‘Niddy, noddy, niddy, noddy,
Three heads on ae body.’

Haply she deemed all the three faces she had seen belonged to the friar, and was happy at witnessing such a monstrous appearance.

Sitting down on her hams as before, she seized on her two implements, and began to blow and stir for about the space of a minute, testifying great impatience to see how her spell proceeded. But the moment that she held up a part of her morsel on the stick, and let it drip off, she perceived that all was wrong, and that her guests were the reverse of those she expected. As soon as she looked at the liquor, she uttered a horrible scream, while every joint of her body shook with fury; and, lifting a wooden ladle that lay by her side with devilish nimbleness, she splashed the boiling liquid on the faces and bodies of our amazed compeers.

‘Deil be in the auld jaud’s fingers!’ cried Tam: ‘Gin she hasna jaupit out baith my een!’

‘I have indeed given my cheek to the firebrand!’ said the friar; ‘and the skin of my forehead hath departed from me!’

‘She brings me a-mind o’ my mither,’ said Gibbie – but he got not time to proceed; for after she had exhausted the contents of her caldron on the intruders, she attacked them with burning coals and pieces of wood. These she dashed among them with such desperate force, that part of them sought refuge in retreat. Not so our redoubted friar. He gave the lamp out of his hand to the laird, bidding him take care of it, and turning his back towards her, and running backward for fear of farther injury to his face and eyes, he seized the witch by the frock, and putting his arm round both hers to restrain them, he held her fast to his side. In doing so, he uncovered the cross that hung at his girdle. When she saw this, and that her body was pressed against it, she uttered the most horrified howlings, and appeared to be falling into convulsions. Nevertheless, the friar kept his hold. He let her scream on, and, dragging her toward the door, said unto her, ‘Thou wicked one! as thy works have been, so shall be thy reward; and as thou hast sown,

so also shalt thou reap. Come with me, and I will put thee into a place where thou shalt cease from troubling.'

Without more ado, he bore her away to the vault where lay her surly and unyielding associate, beside his mass of dry human bones; and forcing her in, he locked them up together, saying, as he turned the massy bolt, 'Lo, the gates of iron and of brass close upon thee! the bolts of steel are drawn around thy dwelling! There shalt thou remain, and there shall thy flesh be consumed, unless thou repentest thee of the evil that thou hast done.'

There was a shrewd smile on the friar's face as he said this, as of one who either did not mean to put his threat in execution, or marvelled how it was that he should thus be lording it in the castle of Aikwood, and imprisoning whom he would.

Never till that instant did any of the party miss their friend and champion, Charlie Scott; but when they turned from the door of the prison to consult what was to be done next, beheld he was wanting. This caused them great dismay, but the friar most of all.

'Wo is me!' cried he: 'How is the mighty departed, and the pillar of our strength moved out of its place! As well may they take my head from my body, and say unto me live, as bid us go on and prosper without that mighty man.'

The poor waggoner must again return from the top of the hill, and bring up the most important and weighty part of his cargo; no less a load than muckle Charlie Scott, laird of Yardbire, and the far famed warlock and necromancer, Master Michael Scott.

The mighty uproar that Charlie made at the head of the stair, when he believed the devil to be on the steps, aroused the great necromancer from his nocturnal experiments, all of which were of an infernal kind. At such hours as these his capacious mind was abstracted from all worldly concerns, such as other mortals busy themselves about. If any thing sublunary engaged his studies and calculations, it was how to make the living die and the dead to live – how to remove mountains out of their places, to turn the sea into dry land, and the fields into a billowy and briny ocean – or in any way counteract nature in her goings on. In some of these great enterprises

was he doubtlessly engaged that morning, when the voice of Charlie Scott astounded his ears.

Often had hosts of demons mustered at his call in the castle of Aikwood, and the yelling sounds of the infernals were no strangers to his ears; but never had he heard such a potent voice before as that sent forth by Charlie, when he conceived himself cooped up between the devil and a bolted door. Conceived did I say? No: Charlie saw distinctly, by this time, an indefinable being coming slowly up to him. Saint Peter! as he did thresh the warlock's door. 'Is there any body here? Hilloa! Open the door I say.' Thump, thump, thump!

The bolt inside was drawn, and, owing to the strong pressure without, the door flew wide open at once. Charlie perceiving the light, and fearless of ought but the figure behind him, rushed into the room, and made toward the fire. The door was instantly shut behind him with a loud and furious clash; and Charlie then turning around, got the first look of the inmate. He was a boardly muscular man, somewhat emaciated in his appearance, with a strong bushy beard that flowed to his girdle, of a hue that had once been jet black, but was now slightly tinted with grey. His eyes were uncommonly bright and piercing, but they had some resemblance to the eyes of a serpent. He wore on his head a turban of crimson velvet, ornamented with mystic figures in gold, and on the front of it was a star of many dazzling colours. The rest of his body was wrapped in a mantle or gown, striped with all the hues of the rainbow, and many more.

Charlie's eye had lately been lighted up with terror, but as it fell on the majestic figure of Master Michael Scott, its wild gleam softened into respect, and he saluted him with his quick, abrupt, border bow, which rather resembled the motion made by a raven beckoning from his rock as he wakes the surrounding echoes, than the slow and graceful courtesy then so well understood among the great. Michael still kept his erect posture at the back of the door, fixing on our yeoman an indignant and angry glance. That look conjured up a little more of Charlie's breeding; he doffed his steel bonnet with the one hand, stroked down the hair of his forehead with the other, and gave the master another bow, or rather a nod.

'Gude e'en t' ye, Sir; I fancy you're the lord o' this castle?' said Charlie.

'You fancy so, do you?' said the Master with a sneer; and giving three tramps with his heel on the floor, in one moment the three pages, Prig,

Prim, and Pricker, stood beside him.

‘Work, Master, work – what work now?’

‘Take that burly thief and housebreaker, bind him, and put him to the test.’

‘Stop short there, my good masters, till I speak t’ ye,’ said Charlie, ‘I’m neither a housebreaker nor a thief, but a leel man, our warden’s kinsman, and your ain, Master Michael Scott. I came here on fair and honourable service, and I have been guidit waur than a tike; and I’ll just tell you plainly, for I’m rather an e’en-down chap, that if ane o’ thae brats dare but to touch me, I’ll tak my hand aff his haffet in sic a way that he sanna grene to lay foul finger on a gentleman again.’

The three pages fell a giggling at this speech, and one of them brushed forward and seized Charlie with a force of which he had no conception. But he was one that never suffered any personal attack with impunity. He drew a stroke with his clenched fist, and aimed such a blow at the page’s head, that, if he had had a head like other pages, would have smashed it to pieces. Charlie hit no head at all. He struck a thing of nought. But the force of his arm was such, that, about two yards farther on, he hit an apparatus of curious construction, which he called ‘a machine for setting the wind on fire,’ and which he made to fly all in flinders against the wall. The Master’s eye kindled with rage; but the three urchins, who delighted in nothing but mischief, laughed still the louder, and pressed all forward on Charlie. He had been a little astounded at missing the page’s head; but, being somewhat flustered, he had not leisure to reflect, and his conceptions were naturally none of the most acute; so, for the present, he took it for a miss. But seeing they purposed to lay violent hands on him, he sprung back into the middle of the room, in order to command weapon space; and drawing out the Eskdale souple, he stood on the defensive in a most determined posture.

The pertinacious elves wheeled also backward, taking a circle round behind the Master, and advanced on him all abreast. Good Lord, with what might Charlie struck at them! He came on them with a hew that he meant should cut them all three through the middle at once. But he, a second time, struck on vacancy. The sword whistled through the void, taking Charlie round with it, and demolishing almost every thing that was in the room. The pages screamed with delight, but Michael foamed with fury. Charlie paid no regard either to him or the devastation he had made among his utensils; but,

springing round the board to the other side of the room, said, in a loud perturbed voice: ‘Tell me just this ae thing, Michael – are thae three creatures deils? Because an they be deils, I hae nae mair chance wi’ them than a cat. But as for yoursel, goodman, I ken ye are flesh and blood, and o’ my ain kith and kin,’ (and with that he seized Michael by the throat,) ‘therefore, either gar thae hellicats gang about their business, or by Him that made us, I’ll thraw your neck about.’

Whether it was the might of the enchanter himself, or that of his bond spirits, Charlie wist not; but in one moment after that his feet were tripped from beneath him, and he was laid on his back on the floor. There he was held by a might against which his great strength could not prevail, bound with cords, and stretched on the board. The Master and his familiars then conversed in Latin, a language of which Charlie knew but little, having never been at court; but he heard they were conversing about his baptism. Charlie had not got much time in his life to think about these sacred rites, yet he had always held them in proper respect and veneration; and at that time he blessed the hour he had been presented in holy church, having strong hopes that on that account the powers of hell would not prevail against him. The elves loosed his buff-belt, and unclasped his steel-doublet, laying his manly bosom quite bare. The Master gave them directions in Latin, and each of them went and brought a long knife with two edges, sharp as a razor, and having a point like a lance.

‘I didna trow that there had been ought sae misleared in nature as this,’ said Charlie. ‘It’s no that I’m ony feared for death. I hae looked him ower often i’ the face to blench at his ca’: but I wad just hae liket to hae fa’en i’ the field wi’ my sword i’ my hand, and no to be cut up like a Christmas pye, and carved a’ into collops by a wheen damned deils.’

One of them prepared to cut open his breast, and another his belly; but a moment’s dispute taking place between them in some unknown tongue, about the mode, as Charlie believed, he crossed himself as well as he could with his bound hands, and pronounced a sacred name into himself. That instant he perceived the pages fall a-trembling, and stand back; their faces blenched with dread, and the weapons fell from their hands. The Master was wroth, and ordered them to proceed, as Charlie weened by his motions; but, instead of that, they retired trembling into a corner. He snatched a knife from one of them, as if determined to do the deed himself. Charlie then

deemed himself gone; for he had a sort of confused idea, that, by certain laws of nature, and the use of holy rites, wicked spirits were restrained, else mankind would be destroyed: ‘But what law of nature, or what holy word or sign,’ thought he, ‘can restrain the arm of a wicked man? It is my duty to try, however,’ thought he again; and with that he whispered a prayer to the Son of the Virgin, that He would save a warrior from a death like this.

Charlie’s prayer was heard, short as it was; for at that very moment, while yet the syllables hung on his lips, entered the gruff figure of the friar, with the keys of the castle over his arm, and followed by his associates.

‘What seek you here, you dogs?’ cried the Master, turning about with the great knife in his hand: ‘Am I thus to have my privacy disturbed, and my abode ravaged by a pack of carrion hounds from the hills? Brave pages mine, bind them all, and cut me them into a thousand pieces.’

Scarcely was the order given ere they had the poet on the floor, and bound with strong cords. The rest prepared to escape; but the great enchanter placed his back to the door, brandished his great knife, and dared them to approach him. The mettledness of these pages cannot be conceived, far less described; they seemed but to will a thing and it was done. Ere ever one of the intruders had time to rally his thoughts, or almost to think at all, three of them and the boy were all lying bound in fetters. But when the imps came to seize on the friar, they could not. They skipped about and about him, but they had not power even to touch his frock. The virgin stood behind him trembling; and on their feeling their want of power over the friar, they turned to lay hold on her. But the moment they touched her robe, they retired back in dismay.

Michael looked as if he dreaded there was something about these two that boded him no good; but he wist not what it was, for he had never seen the prowess of his bond spirits counteracted before; therefore he awaited the event for a space, when he perceived them vanquished.

The friar had time to rally his thoughts, and remembered that the maid had the blessed gospel concealed in her bosom; and judging that these were perhaps fiends with whom they had to do, who durst not stand against the word of truth, he drew his cross from below his frock – that cross which had been consecrated at the shrine of Saint Peter, bathed in holy water, and blessed with many blessings from the mouths of ancient martyrs – had done wonderous miracles in the hands of saints of former days – and lifting that

reverendly up on high, he pronounced the words from holy writ against which no demon or false spirit's power could prevail. In one moment all the three imps fled yelling from the apartment. The countenance of the enchanter fell, and he quaked where he stood; but the eye of the friar was kindled up with exultation and joy.

'There worketh the hand of my master!' exclaimed he: 'There have I trusted, and I am not, like thee, ashamed of my trust. I have a strong-hold of hope, and it is founded on a rock, but thy habitation trembleth beneath thee; and dost thou know, or hast thou considered, what is underneath?'

The friar then went up and loosed the bonds of his friend Charlie, and of all the rest, one by one, exulting in his creed, and pouring forth such sentences of sublime adoration as are not suited for an idle tale.

The Master at length took courage and rebuked him, saying, 'It is vain for thee, foolish dupe of a foolish creed, to multiply such great swelling words of vanity. What though thy might hath, for once, prevailed above my might, and thy spell proved more powerful than mine? I will engage, nevertheless, that in nine times out of ten, mine, on fair trial, shall prevail over thine. And at all events I can at this time call in the arm of flesh to my assistance, and do with you whatever seemeth to me good.'

'Ay, gude faith, and that's very true, Master Michael Scott,' said Charlie: 'and that we saw wi' our ain een. It is great nonsense to quarrel with the lord of a castle aneath his ain roof, although, I confess, I was the first to do it mysel'. But there's an auld saying, wha wad sit i' Rome and strive wi' the pope? or misca' a Macdonald in the raws o' Lochaber? We came wi' nae sic intent, but in fair friendship, and on courteous errand. And now when we are a' rather on equal footing again, let me beg o' you, great and powerful Master, to be a reasonable man for aince. Answer the warden's request, and let us gae; for really, great Sir, our master canna well want us; and mair not that, I'm feared you chaps at the mill dinna gie Corby ony water.'

Though the Master did not understand the latter part of this speech, yet the honest simplicity of Charlie somewhat interested him. His stern and sullen brow cleared to something like a smile; and on looking at the singular and original group before him, he half resolved within himself to have some intercourse with humanity once more. 'If it were but for a day, or even an hour,' thought he, 'would it not form some variety in a life thus

dedicated to searching after hidden mysteries – a life of turmoil and distraction, in which there is no allay?'

Such were some of the thoughts that glanced on the dark mind of the necromancer, as he turned his eye on the broad weather-beaten face of honest Yardbire. 'And what may your master's request be, yeoman?' said he.

Charlie had great hopes that he would now bring matters to a bearing at once; and, coming a step nearer to the Master, he laid the one fore-finger across the other, and answered him thus: – 'Why, gude faith, Sir, it is neither mair nor less than just this: – Ye ken the last time ye war at the castle o' Mountcomyn, ye gae our master, your kinsman, the warden, some little insight anent things that were to come about: – of some bits o' glebes, and hopes, and glens, ye ken, that war to fa' to his house. Now, Sir Knight, or Master, as I should say, he's a man that, aboon a' ithers that ever war born, looks to the honour and the advantage o' his house. He's as loyal as the day's light, as generous as a corn mill, and as brave as a blast o' snaw or a floody river. Od, you will turn either the ane or the ither sooner than you will turn him wi' his muirland callans at his back –. Ay, I hae seen him –. But it's needless to tell what he'll do for his ain. So you see, Sir Master, that was the preceese thing he sent us for.'

'To send troops to his assistance, I perceive?' said the Master.

'Why, Sir Master, to say the truth, we hadna that in charge; though it wad be far mair mack like, and far mair feasible, and far mair honourable into the bargain, to send yon great clan o' rattennosed chaps to help our master, than to hae them lying idle, eating you out o' house and hauld here. Ye wad aye be getting part o' the spulzie. Half a dozen o' kye at a time now and then disna do amiss. Sae, if you will come to terms, I will engage for ane to see you get fair share, to the hoof and the horn, the barn an' the beef boat, the barrel and the bed blanket. But, ye ken, Sir, in matters like this, we maun do ae thing afore another, like business men; and ye maun be sae good, and sae kind, and sae obliging, as to answer our first request first.'

'As far as I can recollect,' said Michael, 'I never heard any request made.'

'Why, gude faith, Sir, ye ken, I believe I forgot that part o't,' said Charlie: 'But ye see, that's neither here nor there; for the thing requires some explanation. Do you ken a' this mad story about the seige o' Roxburgh?'

‘I trouble myself about no worldly things,’ said the Master, ‘nor do I wish to hear about them. Is there no one present who can tell me this great business at one breath?’

Charlie stepped back. ‘There’s nae garring him hae patience – and good troth my tongue I fear has outrun my logic,’ said he: ‘Friar, speak you.’

‘Great and magnificent Master of Arts,’ said the friar, stepping forward, ‘whom I have longed to see above all men! Lo, thou seest, and thou hearest, that this man, although he be a man of might, and a warrior from his youth, is yet uncouth of speech, and altogether diffuse; therefore listen thou diligently unto the voice of thy servant. Behold we are come to thee from the man that ruleth over the borders of the land, and leadeth forth his troops to battle. He sendeth unto thee greeting, and beseecheth to know of thee what shall befal unto his people, and to his house, in the latter days. It is thy counsel alone that he asketh, for thou art renowned for wisdom and foresight to the farthest corners of the earth. The two nations are engaged in great and bloody contest, and high are the stakes for which they play. The man who sent us intreateth of thee to disclose unto thy servants who shall finally prevail, and whether it behoveth him to join himself to the captain of his people. He hath, moreover, sent unto thee, by our hand, these two beautiful captives, the one to be thine handmaiden, and the other to be thy servant and run at thy bidding; and whatsoever thou requirest of our captain, that will he do, even to the half of all that he hath.’

There was but one thing on earth by which the wizard could be flattered, and that was a deference to his profound art. He therefore listened with patience to the friar, and answered, that the request his kinsman had made would take many days to consider of: ‘For,’ said he, ‘I have those to deal with that are more capricious than the changing seasons, and more perverse than opposing tides and winds; therefore remain with me a few days, that I may prove you.’

‘Od bless ye! Sir Master, the thing is impossible!’ said Charlie: ‘I coudna bide frae my captain and chief, and him in jeopardy; neither could I endure to think that my poor beast should want water sae lang. A man’s life often depends on his beast.’

‘Thou givest us no meat,’ said the friar, ‘nor wine nor strong drink givest thou unto us. How, therefore, can we remain in thine house? Nevertheless would I love to abide a short time with thee, to witness thy great might,

before which the masters of divinations in other lands have trembled. Verily, I would also show unto thee what thy servant can do.'

'If I were to cope with such as thee, it would only be to show thee thy littleness!' said Michael. 'But thy creed is an abomination to me, and I abhor it. In the meantime call up my steward, and I will order him to provide you with meat and drink.'

The poet now, for the first time, spoke up in the Master's hearing; and, indignant at the steward's design on Delany, he delivered himself with great vehemence.

'Nay, say not so, great Master. The devil hath possession of that man, sure as the stars burn on the morning's brow. He give us meat or drink! Sooner he will draw forth the crimson current from our veins, and lay us with the dead: Sooner he will rob beauty of her treasure, and deface the image of his Maker. Let us go forth to hill, or dale, or wood, strive with the crow for carrion, or contend with owlets for a mouse; but to be bearded by that same surly beast, the heart of man not brooks it. As for me, I lift my voice, my absolute protest, against the degradation and effect.'

'He is indeed a son of Belial,' said the friar; 'but I have put him in ward, that he trouble us not. Lo, here be the keys of thy castle, which I intend to keep as our surety. Therefore show me the place where thy good things are disposed, and I myself will be steward for a time; for indeed that man of thine is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him.'

The Master's brow lowered with dissatisfaction. His subordinate spirits in whom he trusted had no power over the friar, and other man had he none within the castle, save Gourlay, who was almost as much fiend as man. He therefore intreated the friar to set his steward at liberty, and restore to him the keys, else no meat or drink could be had; and, at the same time, he gave them all warrandice that they should be kindly used.

'My seneschal,' said he, 'is as stubborn and froward as any demon of the pit, nor will he do one kind or fair action save by compulsion. But he dares not disobey me. If he should presume to dispute my orders in the slightest instance, one word from you shall be sufficient, and I will shew you how he shall be requited.'

It was forthwith agreed that the Master should accompany them down to the dungeon, in order to restrain the fury and violence of his servant. Matters were therefore arranged, and the two prisoners set at liberty. The

steward was sullen and intractable, lying still on the dungeon floor, disregardful of the words spoken to him by the friar; but when he heard the Master's threatening accents he sprung to his feet and came forth, looking at Charlie in such a manner as plainly said, 'I shall be revenged on you.'

The Master then took him to task, demanding by whose orders he had shut up his kinsman's friends in the vault. But he only snarled and gnashed his teeth in reply.

'And then to suffer yourself to be mured up there!' said the Master.

'Ay,' said Gourlay; 'some have won a tilt on the king of the field who never saw the day to win it on another.'

'For the viper blood that venoms thy heart do thou ought amiss to these gentlemen,' said the Master, 'or to this obnoxious thing that is their ward! Wherefore, let me ask, were they compelled to shut you up there?'

The steward only grunted in reply; but the poet came again boldly forward, having been exasperated beyond measure at the steward for his attempt on Delany; and he said – 'Sir knight, in that I'll truly counsel you. At dead hour of night, when all was still, save the snell piping of the frosty wind; even we were all at peace, and quiet lay as did the dead man's bones, but that, between, the friar at equal intervals sent forth his nasal roar, so vehement that the mice, yea, and the starveling rats, ceased from their prowling, listened the dire sound from fleshy trumpet of our mother church, then sought, with stretched forth tail, and nimble foot, the depth profound! There quaking did they lie, like fiends driven from the height to the abyss – lank make, chilled heart, and grievous length of tail. At that ill hour, in comes this boding owl, this ill-starred man of sin, and straight demands that peerless maiden for your honour's couch. Him we refused – the maiden shrieked for help – he dragged her forth, and on this laurelled head, crowned by the muses with celestial bays, inflicted ruthless wound. The bedesman also fell; but he our friend, the Hector of the hills, wrought his o'erthrow, and circum-mured him. Thus my say is ended.'

The Master, as the poet spoke, seemed several times so much amused, that they expected he would have burst into laughter. But one look of his eye spoke sentences. When he heard that Gourlay had demanded the maid for him, he gave him such a glance as made the wretch almost cower to the earth; and when the poet ended he turned his eyes on Charlie, measuring him from head to foot, and seeming as if he doubted the fact that he or any

man could master his redoubted seneschal. However, the Master had seen so much of the group, that he determined, contrary to his custom, to have some amusement with them. He therefore ordered his seneschal forthwith to provide all good things for their entertainment.

The stubborn wight made no movement betokening obedience. He stood upright with his dull white face a little elevated, and his eyes turned up below his brows, while those who were next him heard him saying to himself, in accents that creaked in his throat, ‘Hell must be moved for this repast!’ The Master heard not this sentence, but noting his steward’s indecision, he stamped with his foot, and pointing with his finger, the latter led the way into an antichamber of the same cold and naked appearance with the rest of the apartments of the castle, where, leaving them with a light, the two went away into the great Master’s dormitory, ‘To cast their cantrips, and bring up the deil.’

‘He keeps an unco cauld house this carl,’ said Tam, when they were left by themselves: ‘I fancy he’ll ken brawly he’ll hae ane bien eneugh at the hinderend, and downa bide to see fire in this!’

‘He brings me a-mind o’ daft Jock Amosi’ the Goosegreen,’ said Gibbie – ‘wha never durst lie down on a bed because his mother died on ane. Whenever he saw a bed wi’ white sheets on it he fell atrembling, and ran to the gate.’

CHAPTER 15

Goe fetche mee lofe of your wheitan breide
And ane other coppe of wyne;
For drynke I quhile myne doublet ryve,
For drynke I moste repine.
I fele not corauge in myne herte,
Nor mychte into myne honde,
If there is nott wytchrafte forth abrode,
There neuir was crafte in londe.

Ballade of 'Prince Henrie'

The morning had by this time dawned on the gray hills of the forest, and that with an aspect gloomy and foreboding. The white snowy clouds had crept down into the bosoms of the hills; and above these clouds were here and there to be seen the top of a mountain crested with its dark cairn, so that the heavens and the earth seemed to be mingled together.

'Gude sauf us!' cried Charlie, as he peeped out at his small crannied window, 'but this is a grim, gousty-looking morning! I wish the prince o' the air be nae fa'en a brewing some o' his hellish storms and hairikens on us. If there be spirits moving about on thae hills today, they can be nae good anes, ye may see by their look out. Sant Mary be with us! see their drumly heads appear to be raised to double their ordinary height.'

'Be not thou afraid, my son, of the prince of the power of the air, for there is one that is greater than he,' said the friar; 'and though the fiends may for a while muster their fogs, and foment the air with storms, yet will he send forth his angels and scatter them; yea, he will send them forth riding on the whirlwind, and the clouds of heaven shall be their chariots, and the powers of darkness shall fly in dismay before them.'

The friar stepped forward to the window, and gazed for a minute in breathless astonishment; then turning away, he added in a solemn tone, 'Verily, my children, I am afraid to look at the face of the sky, or to behold

the hues that are abroad on the firmament this day, though my strength be the munition of rocks.'

The steward now appeared with his rod of office in his hand, and, with all due ceremony, marshalled his guests up the great stair, and finally up a small winding stair, to an apartment at the very top of the upmost tower, above all the turrets and paved battlements. This room was in a blaze of light with flaming torches all around; and (joyful sight to our precious embassy!) the table was covered with rich viands in great abundance. The friar, having got short of breath in his ascent, lagged considerably behind, while the foremost rushing in, every one began to help himself with the greatest avidity; so that, when the friar at length came puffing into the apartment, all the rest had begun without grace. The seat at the foot of the table was still unoccupied; and before that there stood a beautiful smoking sirloin of beef, with a gentle brown crust around it, and half swimming in gravy. Never was there a more delicious sight presented to a hungry man.

The worthy friar, seeing all the rest engaged, would not risk a trespass on good manners by interrupting them, although it was an established custom with him to bless every meal before tasting it. In conformity with this venerable custom among Christians, he lifted up his spread hands, closed his eyes, and leaning forward above the beef so closely that he actually breathed upon it, and felt the flavour of health and joy ascending by his nostrils, in that fervent and respectful attitude he blessed the beef in the name of Jesus. Never had blessing a more dolorous effect. When the friar opened his eyes, the beef was gone. There was nothing left on the great wooden plate before him but a small insignificant thing resembling the joint of a frog's leg, or that of a rat; and perhaps two or three drops of gravy.

The friar's associates were all busily engaged. The steward was moving about behind them, and at that time happened to be passing by near where the friar sat; of course, this latter worthy had no doubt whatever but that the malicious old rascal had stolen the roast slyly from under his nose the moment that his eyes were closed, whereas the steward was as much astounded as he. It was a fine picture. The friar had placed himself hastily to begin; but, missing his beef, and seeing nothing of it on the board, he was moved with great anger and indignation. There he sat, biting his lip, and having his deep dark eye fixed on the seneschal; and there stood the tall seneschal, with his mouth wide open, his face half raised toward the cornice

of the chamber, and his dull heavy eye fixed on the friar's plate. He was in utter dismay; for he dreaded that, on such a blessing being pronounced openly, the whole of his provisions would in like manner vanish away; and he was a blithe man when, instead of blessing, the friar, on opening his mouth, was rather inclined to curse.

'Cursed be thy malice, for it is great,' cried he: 'Thou Nabal! thou Rabshakeh! thou Shimei, the son of Bichri! thou Er! thou Onan! thou vile Judas, the son of Simon! Magormissabub be thy name; and may it be blotted out after thee, and become a bye-word, and a proverb, and a hissing among people and children. Restore that which thou hast unjustly taken away, before I thrust my sword into thee, and take away thy life. Give unto me the precious morsel thou hast taken away, or, lo! thou art in the jaws of destruction, and the pit openeth her mouth wide upon thee.'

The steward answered neither good nor bad; for he was afraid of the vengeance of his master, and the evil spirits that wrought at his bidding, and delighted in nothing so much as in tormenting him, else had he not taken the friar's curses without repaying them sevenfold. He therefore shut his mouth, and closed his eyes, putting on a countenance of the utmost derision. But the friar's heart had been set upon the beef, his soul had rejoiced over it, and he could not with patience give way to the idea of losing it; therefore, instead of joining the rest, who were devouring their various fare with great eagerness, he continued his anathemas on the steward.

'Blethering gouk!' cried Charlie: 'Can nae ye tak part o' what's gaun, and haud your jaw? What signify a' thae strings o' gospel phrases at sic a time as this? Will they fill a hungry stamock, or mak the worthy seneschal either better or waur than he is? Come pledge me in a cup o' wine to the health of our great landlord, Master Michael Scott.'

They handed the stoup down to the friar, who filled for himself, and took the pledge, though still with a gloomy and a discontented brow. He then left his seat, and went up one side of the board, close to Gibbie Jordan, where he began a-helping himself to a slice, from a mangled shoulder of venison apparently. But it relished not – for still the lost beef was uppermost in his mind, and his eye glanced hot displeasure at the steward.

'Surely he is of all men the most accursed,' added he: 'He drinketh up malice as the ox drinketh up water; and as his name is so is he. Whereunto he hath conveyed the morsel that I loved, is a matter too high for me to

comprehend. I see it not in any corner of the habitation, nor doth the smell of it reach my nostrils. But I will visit it upon his head; and mine eyes shall see my desire on him.'

The dishes of meat were, however, of good quality, and well mixed with fat and lean; yet none of them knew exactly what they were, neither would the sullen steward deign to give them the least information on that head. There was even one large shapeless piece, of a savour and consistence so peculiar that no one of them could tell whether it was flesh or fish. Still they continued their perseverance, devouring one dish after another, and drinking off one stoup of wine after another, without any abatement of appetite on the one side or any exhiliration of spirits on the other, the steward always bringing in a supply with the most perfect equanimity. At length our yeomen began to look at one another. Their hands had waxed weary with cutting, and their jaws would scarcely any more perform their office.

'What is the meaning of this, my brethren,' said the friar: 'Surely it is better for us to desist, lest our table prove a snare unto us. Lo, my hands are weary, and my cheek-bones are pained even to their utmost extremities. Verily, it is all vanity, for my body is only filled as with the east wind.'

'Na, na; ply away. It's good sport. I dinna see how we can be better employed,' said the deil's Tam.

'I think, my brethren, that we should from eating straight refrain,' said the poet; 'for eating is but weariness, and drinking is but pain. There is no strength into our bread, nor spirit in our wine: some warlock wight has ta'en the might out of this food of mine.'

The steward had all this time never spoken word good or bad; but had served them with the utmost obsequiousness; and when they had at length ceased from feeding, he went and gave the Master an account of the repast, which proved a source of great divertisement to him.

'I have not,' said he, 'for these many years, had any desire to trifle with the beings to whose species I once belonged; but this group surpasses all of their kind. I will, therefore, lay aside my profound studies, and be with them as one of themselves. If it were but to torment them, I will indulge in this idle and vain humour. I have almost forgot how human passions work.'

'I pray of thee, Master,' said Gourlay, 'that thou wilt suffer me to slay yon grim and snarling dog in the grey frock. I loathe, hate, and abhor him.

He is, moreover, a bit of a necromancer himself; and has the insolence to suppose that he can rival you in power.'

'It is there I long to try him,' said the Master. 'In power I brook no rival in this or any other land, as thou thyself, and thy wretched companion in bondage, can witness. There is only one thing in this weak man in shape of a friar that I fear, and that thing shall be nameless. Perhaps I may commission thee to take him away. In the mean time, remove the remainder of their wretched viands, and bring me in a vessel full of the strong wine of Palestine, mixed up with the essence of many spirits. It is a beverage fit for gods. In it will I pledge these deranged mortals; and thou shalt see some sport for once, if aught on earth can divert thee.'

'Certes I shall be diverted, great Master of arts. I hope you will favour them with a touch of *the varieties*, by way of example?'

'By and by, Gourlay – all in good time. In the mean while, let us deal with them as men and as gentlemen; and, before I metamorphose them into quadrupeds, let us see what kind of beings they will make of themselves.'

The Master accordingly entered the room, where his guests still sat round the board. All of them rose, and made obeisance; but, without returning the courtesy, he took his seat at the end of the table next to the door, and was just about to address them, when he was interrupted by Charlie Scott. There were two great individuals always uppermost in Charlie's mind – these were his master the warden, and his horse Corby; and finding himself again in the Master's presence, and thinking he rather looked better pleased than he was wont, he judged it prudent not to let the opportunity slip: so, after scratching his head violently with both hands, he thus preferred his solicitation:

'Gude faith, Master Scott, I'm glad I hae seen you again; and, nae disparagement either to you or your house, Sir Knight, but the truth is, we canna bide here. For, in the first place, you see, our skins will gang to the bauks in a jiffey; and, in the next place, our captain, the warden, canna want us. It is far mair than our lives are worth for us to stay here; for, troth, Sir Master, the lives o' others depend on it. Now, I wadna like that we were trowed to be corbie messengers. And that brings me a-mind, Sir Knight, how muckle need I hae to be at the mill down by there. I hae a friend at it that I fear is in nae good plight.'

‘Content you, gallant squire, for a space,’ said the Master; ‘I do intend to answer the request of my noble kinsman with all expedition; but such things cannot be done in a moment. I must read the face of the heavens, and listen to the voices from the deep below. I have likewise a master to consult; he has another; and both are as perverse as hell itself. Be content, therefore, and enjoy yourselves for the remainder of this day. Give me all your names that I may register them, and give me them truly.’

Every one gave his name and designation, save that the poet gave the name of the lovely Delany with an encomium on her beauty and virtue. But Michael cared for none of those things. What appeared beautiful in the eyes of other men, to his were loathsomeness and deformity. Far different was the case when the friar announced his own name.

Michael started to his feet, and, with spread hands, and every feature of his countenance dilated with joy, he exclaimed, ‘What? Primate of Douay in France, and author of the Book of Arts?’

‘The same, great Sir,’ said the friar: ‘I confide it to you: But haply thou dost not know, in this thy retired habitation, that men thirst for my blood; that I am a persecuted man, and have suffered imprisonments, bonds, wounds, yea, and tortures; that I have been hunted from nation to nation, and from land to land, until I found shelter and protection among these wild and reckless Borderers, a people that neither fear God nor regard man. With them have I taken up my abode. I am become a father to them, and they are as children unto me. I love them. But, if they should be induced to give me up, wo would be unto me!’

‘What d’ye say, man?’ said Charlie, grasping his hand. ‘D’ ye think a Scot amang us wad gie you up? If there be sic a man in the Border array, he ought to be d—ned. But I trow I ken a bit o’ the warden’s mind there; and I can tell you, a’ the pens and a’ the rapiers in England wadna gar him gie up the gospel friar. Na, na; if ever he’s gien up, he maun gie up himsel, and mak his ain conditions too.’

‘Great and notable Primate, you are welcome to this castle,’ said the Master; ‘whether by the title of monk, prior, primate, or friar, I say you are welcome here. I have ridden a thousand miles to meet with you. But that is long agone. I had heard of your great skill in the sublime arts, that surpass the comprehension of ordinary men, and I determined to stake my life on the trial of skill between us. I was disappointed in meeting with you, for

you were not to be found, dead or alive. The days of my ambition are fled. My power has been acknowledged so long, none daring to contend with me, that indifference hath ensued; after that came disgust, and with it misery. Thou art the man of all the earth whose fame I have envied; and, if thou darest, I will contend with thee, for freedom or for life, which thou wilt. If thou art overcome, thou shalt be my bondsman and slave, and if thou conquerest I will submit to be thine.'

'Lo, I will contend with thee even for name and being,' said the friar. 'Of the strong-holds of sin and Satan am I not afraid. I have put the ministers of thy vengeance to flight already, and I will chase, yea, I will overcome and pursue them away; as chaff is driven before the wind, will I scatter them. Dare not to contend with me; for, if I judge aright, my Master holdeth thine in chains, and if I interfere thou canst do nothing. I judge it therefore best to contend as brothers contend. To admire what is truly great, and deride that which is insignificant. Mine are the arts of peace, truth, and righteousness, and I hoped thine were the same.'

'Why, art thou not a monk, a follower of the wretched maniac, Benedict of Padua? that driveller in hidden mysteries?' said the Master. 'I do not rightly comprehend thee, or by what power thou didst thwart my servants. Tell me in one word – Art thou not in combination with the potent elemental spirits that rule and controul the earth, the air, the fire, and the waters? If not, thy arts are superficial and worthless.'

'Thou shalt see, and thou shalt judge,' said the friar: 'I am not ashamed of that I can do.' And with that he went and brought up his huge portmanteau, in which he always carried many a small and curious apparatus; but these he kept carefully concealed, having suffered so much from the superstitions of bigotted and illiterate men, in the course of his profound researches. He was the greatest chemist that had ever appeared on the stage of existence; yet that curious and refined art was he obliged carefully to conceal, having been persecuted as a necromancer over every kingdom of southern Europe.

When he went away Charlie Scott was terribly in the fidgets. He expected instantly to witness the raising of the devil, and other infernal spirits, against whom he cherished the most inveterate dislike. His eyes began to set in his head, and the roof of his mouth became so dry that he could not pronounce words distinctly.

‘Gude faith, Sir Master,’ said he, ‘I dinna appruve of a man setting up his birse, and braving a gentleman in his ain house. And, wi’ your permission, I hae something o’ great importance to do at the mill; sae I’ll e’en step down that length, and I shall come up again’ the morning by day-light.’

‘Please to remain with your friends, good yeoman,’ said the Master: ‘You shall witness something worth your while. What can you possibly have to do at the mill?’

‘Muckle, muckle to do at the mill, Sir Knight; I’ll just refer it to yoursel – can either man or beast leeve wanting drink?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the Master: ‘I had almost forgot my principal errand. Gourlay, fill me a glass of the wine of Palestine.’

The steward did as he was ordered; and the Master, taking the cup, drank to the health of his kinsman, the warden, and all his friends. Every one of his guests did the same, save the maiden and boy; and every eye was cleared, and every heart warmed, for the liquor was as strong as brandy.

‘Weel, Sir Knight,’ said Charlie, ‘that is what ane wad ca’ rather stiff sturdy drink; I hae nae tasted ought as weel worth the drinking: And if ye will just gar auld Crossgrains come ower us again, I think I could even prevail on mysel’ to face the deil, and let Corby tak his chance.’

The request was instantly complied with. Each of them got another cup; and the friar having tarried a while to put his affairs in order, when he came back the tongues of all his companions were going at once, and he was apprehensive that they were bewitched. He, however, took the pledge in one full cup, and was greatly revived by it; but refused taking another at that time.

The room in which they sat was lighted by four windows: those to the east and west were small circular ones, having a pane of bright glass in each: those to the north and south were merely long slits in the wall, without any glass; and the first thing the friar did, before producing the specimens of his art, was to close up all these windows, so as to exclude the light of day, and the glass of the western one he either contrived to remove, substituting another in its place, or else he put another piece of magnifying glass over it.

When he began a-closing up the last, Charlie entered a vehement protest against it, on the ground that no body would see what he did, or what he

raised, and any one might be seized by the neck ere ever he was aware, by some o' his infernal deils.

'I hate a' surprises,' added he; 'It's best keeping the crown o' the fell, and seeing weel about ane. Room to fight and room to flee, an ye like, Maister Gospel-friar. Wha do you think's gaun to play at hide-and-seek wi' the deil in sic a place as this?'

The Master, in a sneering manner, requested that the great enchanter might have his own way: and Charlie, whose tongue was a little loosed by the wine of Palestine, was at last restrained, though not without a good deal of grumbling and fidgetting. The room was darkened; the friar went into a small alcove, and, by the help of a magic lanthorn, a thing never before seen in Scotland, he raised up a tremendous and horried figure on the wall. It was of gigantic size; its eyes, lips, and paws moved; and its body was thrown into various contortions.

All were in breathless silence on the appearance of this extraordinary shade; but among the darkling group there was distinctly heard one whose breathing was frequently cut short, as if something had been choking him, or seizing him by the throat.

After the apparition had gone through its various evolutions, all apparently at the further end of the apartment, it fixed its eyes, clenched its teeth, and, stretching forth its claws, it appeared to make a spring forward at the party.

'Aih! L–d be here!' cried Charlie in a trumpet voice, and threw himself flat down behind the rest. Hearing that some of them laughed at the fright he had got, he ventured to speak and expostulate a little; but no curiosity could induce him to raise his face from the floor, or open his eyes again while the friar's exhibition continued. 'Lair him, lair him, friar!' cried he – 'or, od I's be about your lugs some day for this. Lair him, lair him, in the name of St Michael! and if that winna do, try him wi' Peter – he'll send him ower the battlements like a shot. O good friar, whatever ye do, lair him!'

The friar went on with his phantasmagoria. The figure, after giving a shiver or two, was parted into three, all of the same form and size, but all making different motions, and different contortions of feature. The three were afterwards parted into six, which, among other grotesque feats, danced a reel, and, on running thro' it, every one threw itself heels-over-head. The group of onlookers laughed outright at this, notwithstanding their

astonishment, and called to Charlie to look. But he would not move his face from the earth, and only asked, in a half-suffocated voice, ‘Is he no laired yet? Od I shall be about wi’ that cursed body for his tricks.’

When the friar had concluded this feat, he put out his small lanthorn, took the machinery out of it, concealing it beneath his ample frock, and again opened all the windows.

Charlie got up, and running to one of the loop-holes, ‘Gude be thankit, I’ll get a cooke o’ the air o’ heaven again!’ said he, ‘for I hae been breathing fire and brimstone this while byegane. Foul befa’ me gin ever I saw the like o’ yon; I was sair dumfoundered – but wha could stand afore the face of a fiery giant?’

The friar’s associates looked at the lanthorn, examining it with curious eyes, but perceived nothing about it which could in any way account for the apparition they had seen. Master Michael Scott did not deign to ask a sight of it, but paced over the floor in sullen and thoughtful mood. The seneschal stood fixed to the spot on which he had witnessed the phenomenon, with his heavy unmoving eyes turned towards his master. He seemed dubious whether he was vanquished or not. The Master at length spoke, addressing the friar: –

‘I hope, right worshipful Primate, this is not the extent of your knowledge and power in the sublime art of divination? The whole is only a delusion – a shadow – a phantom, calculated to astonish women or children. I acknowledge it to be ingenious; still it is nothing. You multiplied your shadows, turning three into six; now, if I turn three men into six living, breathing, substantial beings, will you acknowledge yourself outdone?’

‘Certes, I will,’ said the friar.

‘Away, then, with deception,’ said the Master: ‘What I do, I do in the open eye of day –. Stand forth three of you.’

‘Master Michael Scott, I’ll tell you what it is,’ said Charlie, ‘I solemnly protest against being parted into twa.’

‘You shall neither suffer nor feel the least inconvenience by the change, brave yeoman,’ said the Master; ‘therefore be not afraid, but stand forth.’

Charlie hung his head to one side in a deep reverie, till at length his countenance lightened up by degrees, his features opening into a broad smile.

‘I’ll tell you what it is, Sir Knight,’ said he, ‘if you will assure me that baith o’ us shall be as stout and as wight chaps as I am mysel e’en now, gude faith, I dinna care though ye mak me into twa, for my master the warden’s sake. If you could double an army that gate, it wad be a great matter. I doubt sair I’ll cast out wi’ my tither half about something that I ken o’, and that’s Corby; but I’ll run the risk. Nane o’ your cutting and cleaving, however, Sir Knight. Nane o’ your imps wi’ their lang-kail gully knives again.’

Charlie stepped up the floor, and took his stand with his back at the wall, to await doggedly this multiplication of himself. Tam soon joined him: but there was a hard contest between Gibbie and the poet, both of whom were rather personal cowards, and both alike averse to such experiments. The former was at length obliged to yield, for Carol clung so close to the maid, that nothing could induce him to part from her; and, ever since the friar gave him the grievous overthrow, he had lost all confidence in his personal prowess.

Michael stamped thrice with his heel, and spoke some words in an unknown tongue, in a low muttering tone; but some of them heard the sounds of Prig, Prim, and Pricker. There was a momentary confusion in the apartment. A darkening haze flashed over it, and blinded the eyes of men for a short space; the floor gave a shake, as if it had sunk down a little – and there stood two of each of the three friends, so completely alike that no one knew who was who.

No scene could be more truly ludicrous than the one which now ensued; each man turned to his prototype, and the looks of confusion and astonishment in both being the same, the beholders were seized with irrepressible laughter.

Charlie felt his legs, thighs, and ribs, if they remained the same as before. The other boardly personage in the same shape followed his example, and added, ‘Gude faith, the like o’ this I saw never!’

‘You may weel say’t,’ said the other; ‘But let me see if you can draw that lang sword as weel an’ as cleverly as I can do.’

‘Gude Lord, hear til him!’ said the first: ‘He’s speaking as he were the true Charlie Scott himsel! Speak ye, friend: Were you me before this! That is, did you ride with the warden over the border?’

‘I am sure if you were there, I never saw you before,’ said the second speaker; ‘But I dinna ken what I am saying; for the truth is I dinna comprehend this.’

With that they again gazed at each other, and looked over their shoulders, as if they would not have cared to have fled from one another’s presence.

With every pair the scene was much the same. Tam was so much astonished that he turned to his second self, cowered down, leaning his hands upon his knees, and made a staunch point at him. The other took precisely the same posture, so that their long noses almost met. The maid, the poet, and the boy screamed with laughter. Both of the Tams laughed too, so that they very much resembled an idiot looking at himself in a glass.

‘Friend, I canna say but ye’re very like me,’ said Gibbie to his partner; ‘But, though nane o’ us be great beauties, ye look rather the warst o’ the twae.’

‘It brings me a-mind o’ a story I hae heard my mother tell,’ said the other, ‘of a lady and her twa Blackamores—’

‘What the deil man!’ exclaimed the first; ‘Did your mother tell that story too?’

‘Ay; wha else but she tauld it? I say my mother, auld Effy Blakely of the Peatstacknowe.’

‘Eh –? She your mother? It is gayan queer if we be baith ane after a’! for I never had a billy.’

The two Gibbies then both began to tell stories, which each claimed as originally his, so that the perplexity still increased. Nor was it better when the parties began to mix and address each other. All spoke of themselves as the right and proper persons, and of the others as beings in their likenesses, and the most complete uncertainty prevailed. But, just as the novelty and interest of the drama began to subside, Michael, by a wave of his hand annihilated the three additional personages, and all remained as it was before the grand exhibition commenced, save that our group had got a new topic of conversation and merriment.

‘Primate of Douay, so celebrated for thy mighty enchantments, how thinkest thou of this?’ said the Master.

‘That thou hast done what no man could have done beside,’ said the friar; ‘and that thy power even surpasseth that of the magicians of Egypt, and of those of the countries in the lands of the east. But in one thing my power is

even as thy power. Dost thou know that I could have prevented thy charm, and put a period to thy enchantment at my will and pleasure?'

'It is not the power of prevention that we are trying,' said the Master. 'Suffer my servants to do their work, as I shall suffer thine, and we shall then see who are most punctually obeyed, and who shall perform the greatest works. Only, if I prevail in all things, you will surely have the generosity to acknowledge that my master is greater than thine?'

'Wo be unto me if such a confession proceed out of my lips!' said the friar: 'Who can be greater than he who builded the stories of heaven, and laid the foundations of this earth below; who lighted up the sun, sending him abroad in brightness and in glory, and placed the moon and the stars in the firmament on high? Who is greater than he who hath made the mountains to stand, the seas to roll, and the winds to blow? who hath not only made the souls of men, but all the spirits of the upper and nether world __'

'Peace, thou maniac!' cried the Master, interrupting the friar, in a voice that made him leap from the floor: 'Comest thou here to babble treason against the master whom I serve, and the mighty spirits with whom I am in league? Do what thou canst do, and cease from speaking evil of dignities. What knowest thou of the principalities and powers that inhabit and rule over the various regions of the universe? No more than the mole that grovelleth beneath the sward –. What further canst thou do in proof of thy profound art?'

'Behold with thine eyes, O thou who accountest thyself the greatest among the children of men!' said the friar, with a waggish air; 'that I will but speak the word, and the mountains shall be rent asunder, and the tops of the everlasting hills stand in opposition. Knowest thou the proper name, figure, and dimensions of that peaked mountain over against the castle, to the west?'

'Well may I know it,' said the Master, 'for I have looked out on it these fifty years, and many a hundred times have I followed the chase around it. It is named Cope-Law, and the mountain is my own.'

'Mountain of Cope-Law, hear my voice,' cried the friar in the same waggish tone, in which there was an affectation of sublime command: 'Thou hast borne the footsteps of thy great master and his black horse Beelzebub, yet hast thou neither been scorched nor rent. Yea, though he

hath cursed thee in the bitterness of ire, yet hath thy grey head never been shaken –. But, behold, a greater than thy master is here. Mountain of Cope-Law, hear my voice: – Be thou rent asunder and divided into three, that thy owner may look on thee and be astonied. If it please thee, mighty magician, look out on thy mountain of Cope-Law now.'

Many a thousand times had the Master looked out at that circular window; every bush and grey stone on the hill were familiar to him; and, all unsuspicious of the simple deceit that had been practised on him, he went and looked forth from the window, when, in the place where one round peaked mountain was wont to be, he actually saw three, all of the same dimensions; and, as he weened, each of them more steep, tall, and romantic than the original one had been. He looked, and looked again – the optical delusion was complete. He paced the floor in sullen mood; muttered some sentences to himself in an under tone, and once more looked forth on the singular phenomenon. The mountains remained the same. They could not be seen from any other window, and no one thought of descending to the great balcony; so that in the eyes of all the friar remained triumphant.

The Master could not brook this. He strode the floor in gloomy indignation; and at length they heard him saying, 'If I should venture to demand it – But is it then to be my last great work? The demand is dreadful! – I will – I'll demand it. Never shall it be said that Michael Scott was out-done in his own art, and that by a poor peddling friar. Come all of you hither,' added he in a louder tone. 'Look at that mountain to the east. It is known to you all – the great hill of Eildon. You see and know that it is one round, smooth, and unbroken cone.'

'We all know it, and have known it from infancy,' was the general answer.

The Master gave three strokes with his heel, and called the names of his three elfin pages, who in an instant stood before him –. 'Work, Master, work – what work now?'

'Look at that mountain to the east,' said he, 'ycleped the hill of Eildon. Go and twist me it into three.'

The pages grinned, looking at him with eyes of a devilish gleam, as a ravenous creature eyes its prey.

'The hill is a granite rock,' said one – 'and five arrow-flights high,' said another – 'and seventy round the base,' said the first.

‘All the powers of earth, and hell to boot, are unmeet to the task,’ added the third.

‘Thou art a proud and impertinent liar, perverse imp of the regions of flame,’ said the Master: ‘Note this, The thing must, and shall be done; even though a body and soul should both be given up as the guerdon. I know my conditions; they are sealed, and subscribed, and I am not to be disobeyed. Get to your work without more hesitation.’

The three pages then fell to reeling about and about, singing a wild and uncouth trio, in words of the following import:

‘Pick and spade
To our aid!
Flaught and flail,
Fire and hail!
  Winds arise, and tempests brattle,
  And if you will the thunders rattle.
Come away
Elfin grey,
  Much to do ere break of day!
  Come with spade, and sieve, and shovel;
  Come with roar, and rout, and revel;
  Come with crow, and come with crane,
  Strength of steed, and weight of wain,
  Crash of rock, and roar of river;
  And, if you will, with thunders shiver!
Come away,
Elfin grey;
  Much to do ere break of day!’

As they sung these last lines they reeled out at the door in a circular motion, so rapid that the eye dazzled which looked on them. The poet, drawn involuntarily by the ears after that wild fairy lay, hasted out after them. He looked east, and west, and all around, but he only saw three crows winging their flight toward the hill of Eildon.

From the time of their departure the temper of the great Master became extremely variable. At one time his visage would be clouded with the gloom

of despair, and at another lighted up with a sort of horrid exultation; but he spake not, save to himself.

The friar, therefore, in order to divert his host, and gratify his own vanity, proposed to show off some more wonders of his art. Accordingly he closed up all the windows once more, making the apartment as dark as pitch, and exercised many curious chemical devices, lighted Roman candles, and made them dance about the chamber in every colour of the rainbow.

He was still busily employed playing off his little ingenious tricks, when the party were disturbed by a bustle in one of the corners. It chanced to be so dark at the moment that no one could see what was going on; but they heard a noise as of two people struggling; then a blow, and one falling down with a groan.

The friar paused, calling out and enquiring what it was. Charlie, never behind in a fray, bustled over the forms toward the scene of action; but falling by the way, the noise was quickly removed to another corner, a door was opened and shut, and all was again quiet.

Every one ran about groping his way in the dark, and coming full drive against others, till the friar had the presence of mind to pull the stuffing out of some of the windows. The first thing they then saw was the poet lying on the floor, void of sense and motion; and then it quickly appeared that the steward and Delany were a-wanting. The whole party, save the Master, set out on the pursuit, headed by the friar and Charlie, and came just in time to rescue the maid as the wretch was dragging her into his abominable cell. It seemed that he had determined on seizing her as his prey, and now that the three infernal pages, his tormentors, were dispatched elsewhere, he feared neither the Master nor his guests; and, taking advantage of the utter darkness, and of the poet and her being in a corner by themselves, he stole up to them, gagged the maid, silenced the poet, who resisted, with one blow, and then bore off the helpless lady with all expedition.

When he saw that he was overtaken and overpowered by numbers, he only laughed at them; and assured them that, in spite of all they could do, he would have possession of her, and that they should see. The girl wept and complained of being hurt; but then he only laughed and mocked the louder. Some of them proposed that they should hew him all to pieces, but the friar had resolved on his measures, and, at his request, they took the culprit up before the Master, and there lodged their accusation against him. But the

Master either durst not, or would not say a word against him; for, in fact, it appeared that this great man, without his familiar spirits, shrunk into nothing, and was not only afraid of his own bondsman, but of every thing around him, deeming himself altogether without help.

The friar's eye burned with indignation and rage, at witnessing such arrogance on the one hand, and imbecility on the other; but his bootless wrath only delighted the steward the more; and it was evident that, had it not been for fear of Charlie Scott's long sword and heavy hand, he would have taken his prey from the midst of them.

Delany still wept and sobbed till her bosom was like to rend, and begged to be taken away from the castle, or to be killed and put in her grave. The friar tried, with all the fair and kind speeches he was master of, to comfort her; but when she saw the poet pale, bleeding, and sitting still unable to rise, she only waxed worse, and hid herself from the eye of the wretch behind the friar's frock.

'Daughter of my love, and child of many misfortunes, be thou comforted,' said the friar; 'for though the wicked triumph for a space in their iniquity, yet shall they not thrive. They who refuse to do justice to the innocent and upright in heart shall perish in their sin, and pass away as the smoke that is driven by the wind. Therefore, my daughter, be thou comforted; and that thy heart may be cheered, I will show thee a wonder of my art – a wonder so great that whosoever seeth it his heart shall melt within him; and whosoever heareth of it his ears shall tingle. Come, whoso listeth, forth into the open air, and I will do it in the sight of heaven and of man.'

The friar then lifting up his huge portmanteau, went forth to the large paved gateway that surrounded the whole of the uppermost arches of the castle. It was so ample as to be like a small field, for it covered all the castle, save four small pointed turrets, and the square apartment which the party now left, that rose like a shapeless dome above all. In one corner of this level battlement there stood a leaden vessel that had once been used as a cistern. To that the friar went; and, laying down his huge walise, he took from thence a handful of blackish sand, and strinkled it all around the battlement on the one side to the opposite corner. He then stood and looked awfully around him. He looked to the heavens, but they were shrouded in a dark hideous cloud that now covered the mountains, and hung lowering

over the uppermost spire of the castle. Neither the Cope-Law nor the hill of Eildon could be seen, nor could aught be seen save the dark and troubled cloud. The scene was truly impressive; and when the rest saw the friar looking on it with such apparent dread, all of them looked abroad with him, and whispered to one another, ‘He’s gaun to be about some awesome enchantment now.’

The friar covered up his portmanteau with the leaden vessel, and then desired the Master to bring any weight he chose, and heap it on its bottom, which he had now turned uppermost, and, at one word or sign, he would make his goat-skin wallet carry the vessel, and all such weight, round the battlements of the castle.

The Master, and every one present, pronounced the thing to be impossible – the steward grinned in derision – and, after mocking and taunting the friar on his art in the most gross and provoking terms, he proffered to hold down the leaden tub, wallet and altogether, or to forfeit his head if he failed. Then laying himself over it, in the attitude of holding it down, he called on the friar to proceed, and give him the promised canter round the walls, which he well deserved, he said, not only for his kindness to them all, and to their Miss in particular, but also for his kind intentions. Then he scoffed aloud, crying out, ‘Now thou poor vain fool and liar, be as good as thy word, and give me, an it were, but one hobble.’

‘God do so to me, and more also,’ said the friar, ‘if I do not give thee such a hobble as eye hath not seen!’

With that he struck a spark of fire among the black sand, as the rest supposed it to be, that lay among his feet. The sand caught fire – the flame ran sputtering around the western battlement – and the next moment the steward and his tub bolted away into the firmament in a tremendous flash of fire, and with a sound so loud that it shook the castle to its foundations. Some averred that they saw, through the fire and smoke, a momentary glance of him and the cistern both, as they pierced the cloud towards the north; but nothing further was heard or seen – and, in a second of time, all was quiet and gloomy above and around as it had been before.

CHAPTER 16

The wind blew as 'twould blawn its last,
The thickening showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleam the darkness swallowed,
Loud, deep, and lang the thunder bellowed;
That night a child might understand
The deil had business on his hand!

Tam o' Shanter

Long was it before any of the astonished spectators opened their lips. The shock had almost deprived them of sense, sight, and motion; and when they began to articulate, it was only to utter short exclamations, and names of saints. Tam Craik was the first who ventured a remark, which was in the following words: – 'By the Lord Robin!' (meaning, it was supposed, the king,) 'The deil has flown away wi' him bodily in a flash o' fire!'

The great Master stood mute with astonishment; he even trembled with dread; and appeared once as if he would have fallen at the friar's feet: But he never said, Where is my seneschal gone? Whither hast thou sent him? seeming rather to succumb to his guests for the time, being as a man utterly at their mercy. His powerful and malevolent spirits had left him by his command; his steward, and only human attendant, had been blown into the air; and as for the miserable night-hag, they had seen no more of her since her escape from the prison vault, and they wist not whether she remained in the castle, or had fled from it out of dread of the symbols of the Christian religion, which she had seen about the friar, and the effects of which she had felt in frustrating her potent spells. The wizard had therefore none to execute his commands, and appeared a being quite forlorn, as well as greatly troubled in his mind.

No one ever knew to this day by what means the wicked seneschal was borne away among the clouds in a column of fire and smoke; and those who witnessed it spread the word over the country, that the devil took him away

with a great roar amid fire and brimstone; and that, after having him up among the dark clouds, he tore him all to pieces. It was a fact that one of the steward's mangled limbs was found hanging on a tree, among some thick branches, in the wood of Sheil's Heuch, over against the castle, which gave some countenance to the report; and no farther remnants of him were ever discovered.

The friar, however, knew well enough by what means he was taken away; and though he never explained it as long as he remained in Scotland, it is meet that the readers of this tale should know the truth. It can be told in a few words. The friar had brought his huge wallet full of the strongest gunpowder he had been able to make, to shew off his wonderful feats, and astonish the great Master. The exigency of the moment induced him to part with it all at once; and, in all probability, he could not have caused so much astonishment by any experiment he could have put in practice.

He was guilty, however, of a manifest oversight; one that had well nigh proved fatal to the whole party in its consequences. When they found themselves freed from their vile persecutor, and the great Master rather their prisoner than they his, their first thought was of departing from that unhallowed place, and awaiting, in the neighbourhood, the wizard's final answer, without which they durst not well return to the warden.

Charlie jumped on the battlement with very joy that he would now get down to the mill to see what was become of Corby, and how he fared; and he was the first man to proceed down the narrow staircase, leading the way to the fair fields. But, alas, how transient are all sublunary joys and hopes! In the middle of this confined and difficult stair, just at its darkest and most acute turn, there was a massive iron door, which Charlie ran his nose against in his descent, and soon found, to his mortification and disappointment, that it was locked and double locked. He returned to those above with the dismal information. The friar's countenance fell, and he became pale as ashes, when it was thus brought to his recollection that he had not only blown the brutal seneschal to the devil, but that he had blown the keys of the castle along with him; and there were they left on the roof to perish with hunger.

After many ineffectual attempts to break open that door, having no other resource, they agreed to go to the topmost tower, and there unite their voices, in order to raise the country to their assistance; for, without ropes

and ladders, they saw no means of escape. Accordingly they ascended, and uttered many a prolonged and tremendous shout, for the space of a whole hour. But these unwonted cries only drove the hinds to a greater distance from the castle. Many of them had witnessed the mighty explosion at the exit of the seneschal, which, in the middle of the lurid gloom, had a hideous effect; and when they heard such long and loud howls proceeding from the battlements of that gloomy and desolate pile, they weened that a whole host of demons had assembled about it, and kept far aloof.

In these and other fruitless exertions, our hapless prisoners spent the evening of that eventful day. The sun, or the blue sky, had not once appeared since the break of morn. For a little while, about noon, the hills of the Forest were visible, and, on their back-ground of pale shadowy clouds, formed a scene of dark sublimity. Still, as it approached toward evening, these clouds came lower and lower down upon the hills, and became more dark and dense in their appearance; and precisely at the close of day the storm burst forth in all its fury, sweeping over hill and dale with increasing majesty every minute. The woods roared and crashed before the blast. The snow descended so thick that in a short time every ravine and sheltered dell was heaped. After that came sleet and snow mingled; and, finally, a driving rain dashed with such violence on the earth, that it seemed as if a thousand cataracts poured from the western heaven to mix with the tempest below. Needless is it to describe that night farther. It was that on which the great battle was fought in the camp of Douglas, and formerly mentioned in this momentous history –. It is therefore apparent that Isaac the curate is now drawing near to the same period of time when he broke off at a tangent and left the camp, and that every thing will, of course, go on to the catastrophe without further interruption.

Kind hearted and gentle reader, be not too sanguine. Who can tell what is to fall out between the cup and the lip? Incidents seem to have multiplied intentionally to interrupt poor Isaac’s narrative. Besides, let any one consider how he is to liberate and get free of this group of interesting individuals, locked up, as they were, to perish on the top of the castle of Aikwood. It was no difficulty to Isaac. He was one of those wise and

downright men who know that truth tells always the best, and to that maxim he adhered. But the worst of it was, there were so many truths, that any body may see it was scarcely possible to get them all narrated in their proper places; and that, without the help of the waggoner, the task could never have been effected.

‘Gude sauf us, but it is gaun to be an awsome night!’ said Charlie Scott, as he stepped the last up into the dark apartment in which the party had spent the greater part of the day, and into which the storm had now driven them once more.

‘Gaun to be?’ said Tam, taking up Charlie’s words; ‘I wot nae what it is gaun to be, but it is an awsome night already.’

‘It brings me in mind of a story,’ said Gibbie, ‘that I hae often heard about a friar Gabriel o’ St Martin’s that raised the deil—’

‘Od, Sir, an ye dare, for the blood of you, speak another word about raising the deil the night,’ cried Charlie, interrupting him, ‘may I be chased by an Englishman, if I dinna thraw you ower the castle wa’. We little ken wha may be near, or wha may be amang us. Gin ane may judge by appearances, that same chap ye hae named (gude keep me frae repeating it) isna in his ain hett hame the night. Heaven defend us, hear how the wind howls and sobs! I wish yon auld houses o’ the mill may be safe aneuch; they stand sair exposed. Hech-ho! hear til’t! There will be mony cauld quarters on Otterdale the night, but there is some a-wanting there that wad be blithe to share them.’

The friar now set himself to strike a light, which at last he effected; and collecting the oil which remained in the lamps into one, they found, to Charlie’s great satisfaction, that they had as much as would burn over-night, besides some remnants of waxen torches. Of all the huge remains of their morning feast that they had seen removed from the table, they could not find one vestige, even though the trenchers remained in the chamber as it was termed; but, to their great joy, they found an article as precious to the eyes, for about two-thirds of the huge flagon of the wine of Palestine were still left. This, in the total absence of fuel, was a discovery of some consequence; and the friar, in the like absence of a steward, took that office voluntarily on himself.

When the lamp was kindled, the first thing that Delany did was to dress the poor poet’s hurt head, and bind it up with a napkin. This attention and

kindness so thrilled his heart that he could not refrain from tears, and seemed to rejoice in his wound; and as both he and his adored maiden had seen the ruffian steward transported up to heaven in a flame of fire, they were freed from all terror on his account; and, notwithstanding all the perils with which they were surrounded, they appeared composed, and, if not happy, were at least quite resigned to their fate.

The great Master sat muffled up in his cloak, and apart by himself, his brows screwed down into deep curved wrinkles, and his sunken eye fixed on the ground. The friar filled a cup of wine, and, bowing, presented it to him the first. He took the cup, and drank if off, but he spoke not a word: his piercing eyes glimmered round the chamber; he uttered a loud groan, and, apparently, sunk again into his deep reverie. The transportation of his steward, while in the very act of braving the friar's might, made a terrible impression on his mind, and he weened that he now sat before his master – before one that might send him on a voyage of the same nature whenever he chose; and therefore he judged, with great reason, that for a space it behoved him to keep on good terms with so dangerous an opponent.

When each had taken a cup of the elevating beverage, the effect was delightful; all their cares, dangers, and wants faded; the terrors of the storm, that was still increasing, only startled them now and then, as it rattled on the tower, or yelled thro' the crevices below. They chatted, laughed, and broke jokes on each other, till even the sublime Master was diverted from his profound and brooding ideas, and smiled at the rustic simplicity of the characters around him. The laird of the Peatstacknowe told a great number of his long stories, of which something that was seen, said, or done, always reminded him; Charlie told confused stories about battles and forays; and the poet came in always between with his rythmatic descriptions and allusions; until at one time the associations of ideas followed one another in a manner so truly ludicrous, that the enchanter actually laughed till he had almost fallen into a fit, a thing that had not for twenty years been witnessed of him.

The tempest still continued to rage, and the loquacity of the party beginning to flag, they became drowsy as midnight approached. The friar then looking gravely around him, and, laying aside his hood, took a small psalter book from his bosom; which volume also contained the four books of the Apocalypse; and, opening it reverendly, he proposed that they should

all join in performing the evening service to the Virgin, and the hymn to the Redeemer. Delany rose from off the lap of the poet's cloak, where she had sat nestling all the evening, and came and kneeled down at the friar's knee. The Master started up with a look of indignation, stamped on the floor, and ordered the friar to put up his vain book, and refrain from such flummery in his presence. The friar looked at him with a steady countenance.

'It is not meet that I should obey man rather than God,' said he. 'I have taken a vow in the face of Heaven, and I will pay that vow in spite of men and devils. I will sing my holy hymns with these my friends and children, and he that listeth not to join, let him be accursed, and translated from the presence.'

This last sentence sounded rather equivocally in the Master's ears. He liked not such a translation as he had lately witnessed; for, with all his power and mysterious art, the terrors of death still encompassed him about. He held his peace, therefore, although he growled like a lion at bay at being bearded thus in his own castle.

The friar proceeded as he had said, and all the rest joined him with becoming devotion, save the poet, whose orisons that night were somewhat cold. He could not brook the charm that drew Delany from his own side to his rival's knee. The Master sat aloof, biting his lip, and grinning in derision; but, at one part of the service, although the curate does not say what part, he was insensibly overcome, and fell into a painful oblivious dream. The strains of the sacred music, simple as they were, stole over his soul, as some remembrance of early life sometimes steals into the heart of enfeebled age, reminding the decaying and dying worm of joys he can no more see, and of feelings of delight that have perished for ever –. If a son of the mountains of the north were transported to some far foreign clime, and there doomed to remain for life: After sojourning in that land for half an age, until grey and bowed down, if by chance, on some still evening, or mayhap through the eddies of the storm, one of the strains of his native land were poured on his ear, think of the recollections it would awaken in his mind: How painfully thrilling the sensations! Would it not be like the last sweet beam of a hope he was never more to cherish, a last look of all that was dear on earth? – Such were the feelings that crept unbidden over the soul of the enchanter, on hearing the sweet sounds, that reminded him of a

religion he had for ever renounced, and in which he had never firmly believed till he had believed to tremble.

In this troubled trance he sat leaning against the wall, until the worshippers had reached the middle of the hymn to the Saviour. He then was seized with strong convulsions, and, rising up, with staggering steps, he fled from the chamber, crying as he went – 'Cruel and improvident things! reptiles! cursed, whining sycophants! that would send me to my doom before my time!' He rushed out to the battlements, and, groping his way through the storm, took shelter in the narrow staircase, that he might hear no more of the sounds that thus troubled and distracted his soul. What dread had seized him, or what he had seen or heard, his guests knew not; but they had scarcely well ended their hymn, when he rushed again in among them, with wildered looks, and his hair standing on end, seeming glad to take shelter among those from whom he had so lately fled with abhorrence. No one enquired the cause, for all were so weary and overcome with slumber; and every one then composed himself to sleep in the manner that best suited his convenience.

The storm continued to rage with unabated violence, and, after they had laid themselves down, they found that the castle was all tottering and quaking before it. The firmest heart was appalled; for the rocking of the castle was not all; every now and then they heard eldritch shrieks arising, as of some wretch perishing, or rather, as some of them thought, like the voices of angry spirits yelling through the tempest. When one of these howling sounds came on the blast, every one of our prostrate friends breathed a deep sigh, or uttered some exclamatory sound. Charlie had always one, which he uttered even after he was asleep. 'Hech! Gude sauf us, sirs! what will be the upshot o' a' this?' The Master sat muffled up in the corner close behind them, and after he judged them all to be asleep he fell a-crooning a sort of hymn in an under key. The poet was, however, more than half awake, and gathered up some broken fragments of it. Poets are never to trust when they give quotations from memory out of the works of others; and perhaps honest Carol might add some bombastic lines of his own, but he always averred that the following lines formed a part of the warlock's hymn.

'Pother, pother,

My master and brother!
Who may endure thee,
Thus failing in fury?
King of the tempest that travels the plain;
King of the snow, and the hail, and the rain,
Lend to thy lever yet seven times seven,
Blow up the blue flame for bolt and for levin,
The red forge of hell with the bellows of heaven!
With hoop, and with hammer!
With yell, and with yammer;
Hold them at play,
Till the dawn of the day!
Pother! pother!
My sovereign and brother!
O strain to thy lever,
This world to sever
In two or in three—
What joy it would be!
What toiling, and moiling, and mighty commotions!
What rending of hills, and what roaring of oceans!
Ay, that is thy voice, I know it full well;
And that is thy whistle's majestic swell;
But why wilt thou ride thy furious race,
Along the bounds of vacant space,
While there is tongue of flesh to scream,
And life to start, and blood to stream?
Yet, pother, pother!
My sovereign and brother!
And men shall see, ere the rising sun,
What deeds thy mighty arm hath done.'

If it was true that the Master sung these ridiculous lines, which is not very likely, his 'sovereign and brother' had not accepted of his sacrifice, nor paid due deference to his incense of praise. For, a little before the break of day, our group were aroused from their profound slumbers by loud and reiterated cries. The lamp was still burning feebly and blue. Charlie, whose

ear was well trained to catch any alarm, was the first to start up; but the sight that he saw soon laid him again flat on the floor, though not before he had leaped clear over a narrow oak-table and two forms. There was a black being, that appeared to be half-man and half-beast, dragging Master Michael Scott along the room toward the door; yet he dragged him with difficulty, and at some times the wizard seemed rather to prevail. Horrible as this phantom was, all those who saw it agreed that there was something about it that instantly reminded them of the late seneschal; and, as they raised their heads and beheld it, every heart was chilled with terror. Charlie pronounced his short, loud prayer, which has already been recorded in this history, and which consisted merely of one vehement sentence of three syllables; yea, he pronounced it as he flew; and then squatting in a corner, and covering his head with his cloak, that, whatever dreadful thing happened, he might not see it, there he lay repeating his little prayer as fast as human breath could utter it.

The demon struggled hard with the Master; and the latter, as may well be supposed, exerted his utmost power – so that his adversary only got him toward the door as it were by inches. When he found himself losing ground, he always made a certain writhing motion, which cannot be described, and which every time extricated him somewhat from his adversary's clutches. Then the apparition laid hold of him again by the left side with his lobster claws, and that gripe uniformly caused the wizard to utter a loud and piercing cry. At such times Charlie's little prayer might be heard waxing still louder as the strife increased; and, though he lifted not his face from the earth, he continued a kind of spurning motion with his feet, as if he would fain have burrowed under the wall like a mole.

For a long time no one durst move to the Master's assistance. The scene so far surpassed ought they had ever conceived in horror, that their senses remained altogether benumbed. The combat continued with unabated ardour. The Master foamed at the mouth, his hair stood all on end, and his bloodshot eyes stared wildly, as if they would have started from their sockets. At length the fiend so far prevailed as to drag the Master close to the door, where he threw him down, and made a motion as if he would have dashed him through below it. But Michael was flesh and blood, and could not enter nor depart by the key-hole, or the foot of the door, like the beings with whom he had to do. The demon therefore tried to open the door; but

the enchanter's muscular frame being jammed against it, it could not be opened at once. Michael's efforts were now directed to that object alone, namely, the keeping of the door shut, and he exerted himself till his remaining strength was exhausted, but at last suffered himself to be dragged back from the door, repeating these words as he lay flat on his back: – ‘’Tis done! ’Tis done! ’Tis over! ’Tis over!’

The lookers on sat and trembled, all save the friar, who had by that time somewhat rallied his scattered senses, and stood on his feet. The fiend had dragged the Master back from the door by the feet, and holding him down by the grey hair with one hand, he opened the door with the other; then, stooping down, he twisted the one hand, armed with red crooked claws, in his hair, and the other in his long grizzled beard. The friar had stepped forward, and, at that moment, laying the rood on the Master's forehead with the one hand, and the open Book of the Gospels on his breast with the other, he pronounced a sacred Name, and in that name commanded the demon to depart. Swift as the javelin leaves the hand of the warrior, or the winged shaft flies from the bow-string, did the monster fly from the symbols of a creed by which he and his confederate powers were all controlled, and from a name and authority at which the depths of hell trembled. He rushed out at the door with a yell of dismay, and threw himself from the battlement on the yielding wind. The friar peeped forth after him, but he only heard a booming sound, which died on the gale, and beheld like a dragon of blue livid fire flying toward the east, in the direction of the hill of Eildon.

The friar returned into the chamber with a countenance beaming with joy. No conqueror ever returned from the field of battle with an exultation of mind so sublime as that which now lighted up his uncourtly mien. His victory had been so sudden and so complete, that all present were astounded at the greatness and extent of his power, and none of his friends doubted that his might was as far above that of their host as the sun or the stars are above the earth. They had in this instance seen it exemplified in a manner not to be disputed; and there was the Master himself still sitting on the floor, and gazing on his deliverer with astonishment.

‘Man, may I not thank thee for this?’ said he.

‘No,’ said the friar, ‘think not of a poor mortal thing like me, overcome with sins, faults, and follies: You are freed for this time; but thank One who is greater than I.’

‘True; I am freed for the present,’ said the Master; ‘but it is by a mode, and by a power, that I dare not, for my existence, acknowledge or acquiesce in.’

When Charlie heard by what was passing that the devil had been vanquished and was fled, he called out with a voice that seemed to come from under ground – for he was so muffled up in his cloak that the sounds could scarcely be heard – ‘Friar, steek the door.’ The good man obeyed, and as soon as Charlie heard the welcome sound, he raised his face, which was much of the same colour as a living lobster, and, standing on one knee, viewed all the faces and corners with that eloquence of eye which is quite indescribable. How superior was it to his blunt address: – ‘Gude sauf us, callans, is a’ safe? – Is the coutribat ower? Sic a fie-gae-to as yon I saw never! Hech! but it is an unsonsy place this! I wadna live here an there warna another place to be had aneath the shoulder o’ heaven.’

A long discussion now commenced between the friar and the Master, on the principles which each of them professed. That colloquy is too serious, and too tedious, to be copied at full length in this place; but it amounted simply to this – That the one considered the Christian Revelation as the source of all that is good, wise, or great among men. The other had disbelieved it from his youth upward; and, not being able to come to any conclusion from ought he could learn among men, he had besought communion with the potent spirits of the elements; and, after seven years of unparalleled suffering, such as cannot be named, had attained what he sought. These had confirmed him in his infidelity. He had entered into a league with them, renouncing, for ever and ever, all right in a Redeemer, and signing the covenant with his own blood. That afterwards he had rejoiced in this fellowship, which had enabled him to do deeds such as no other man could perform, till by degrees he discovered that the meanest professor of the religion of Jesus, if influenced by faith and sincerity, had the power of counteracting these mighty spirits, and of frustrating their highest intents. That then his eyes were opened when it was too late, and he only believed in time to tremble and despair. The friar urged the inexhaustible riches of heavenly mercy; but the Master spurned at it, declaring his resolution to abide by his covenant, whatever his fate might be. He despised the very name and nature of repentance, and would rather suffer with the colleagues he had chosen, he said, than whine and cringe to

another master–. ‘Though I now feel to my sorrow that they are subordinate,’ added he, ‘yet are they mighty and powerful, beyond what thou canst comprehend; and why may not I be a sharer in their energies in a future existence as well as in this?’

The friar gazed and trembled when he heard the wild and erratic ideas of this extraordinary man; and, ceasing to reason further with him, he enquired how it came that some of these mighty associates of his were his enemies, and seemed but to watch an opportunity of tearing him in pieces.

‘They are jealous of their rights, and capricious beyond all conception,’ said he. ‘The utmost circumspection is not fit to keep on fair and equal terms with them. Even yet I do not know but that this is to be my last night here. If I have gone beyond my commission in the orders I have given, then am I doomed to be their bond slave for ages: but if I am within my limited bounds, and the work is effected, then shall I still be obeyed for a time and a season. Would that it were morning that I might know the worst!’

‘Scarcely dost thou need to express thy wish again,’ said the friar; ‘for, lo, the day dawneth in the east, and the shadows flee away before it; the winds have gone to their chambers to sleep, and the rains are over and gone. Let us walk forth and see how the darkness fadeth before the face of the day, and all that is stirring abroad on the fair face of the creation.’

The Master did not move, for it was yet but twilight, and nothing could be seen distinctly; but the friar stepped down to the battlements, and Charlie, who looked on him as their only safeguard, followed. The poet would doubtless have followed also to have seen the dawn of the morning after a storm; but, like all the rhyming race to this day, he was enslaved by the eyes of a maid, languished in chains, and could not move but as she moved. Alas for the poor amorous poet! The others lay in a sluggish and restless slumber.

The friar and the bold yeoman strode together along the paved way, and looked abroad; but they could see only the clouds whitening in the eastern horizon, without being able to distinguish wood from waste, or land from water.

‘Let us kneel down and pray, my son,’ said the friar, ‘even in this quiet place, where we shall be freed from the interruptions of the wicked one; for great and manifold are the dangers that surround us. I see not what remains

for us, but either to throw ourselves from the walls and perish, or remain where we are and feed upon one another.'

'It is an awsome eternitive, man,' answered Charlie; 'I'm sure an ye think praying will do ony good, I shall take off my bonnet and kneel down on my knees, and hearken weel; but what mair can I do?'

'You can join with me in spirit, my son,' said the friar, 'and pray with your heart.'

'I am sure, gin I but kend the process, I am very willing,' said Charlie. With that he took off his steel belted bonnet, and kneeled reverendly beside the friar, who prayed so fervently and sublimely for deliverance, that Charlie looked about every minute, not only then, but all that morning, to see by what means they were to be delivered; for he had no doubt but they would be set free to a certainty, and that in a very short time.

When they arose, the first word that the friar said was the following fervent exclamation – 'Blessed Virgin! What do I see?'

Charlie looked all about for some approaching miracle; he had even some hopes of seeing a detachment from the warden's army; but his eye ranged the dusky fields in vain.

'What a strange world we live in!' rejoined the friar: 'Yea surely there are things in heaven and in the earth, and in the waters – yea many things, of which man knoweth nothing! Why art thou gazing abroad on all nature, my son? Turn thine eyes toward the east, and tell me what thou seest.'

Charlie did so; and, on the instant, the two friends were standing fixed in amazement like two statues. They moved not, save, now and then, to steal a momentary glance at each other. The great mountain of Eildon was actually rent in pieces from the top to its very foundations, and piled up in three towering spiral mountains, as they remain to this day. Only at that time they were taller, darker, and more uniform.

It was a scene of wonder not to be understood, and awfully impressive. The two rivers flowed down their respective vallies, and met below the castle like two branching seas, and every little streamlet roared and foamed like a river. The hills had a wan, bleached appearance, many of the trees of the forest were shivered; and, towering up against the eastern sky, there stood the three romantic hills of Eildon, where before there was but one.

The friar was the first to move from his trance, stepping away in deep meditation. Charlie was by this time likewise released from the spell, and

he ran to the door of the high chamber, calling aloud, ‘Come a’ out, sirs, come a’ out. The like o’ this was never seen sin the warld stood up!’

They came forth accordingly, and their consternation was correspondent to the extraordinary event. But when the Master came out, and saw what was done, he shouted, and leaped on the battlement like one frantic, boasting, and uttering words of terrible blasphemy. He looked on the mountain of Cope-Law, and he could scarcely believe his eyes when he beheld it standing in one unskaithed unbroken cone, as it had done for ages. He looked again to the three mountains of Eildon, and his exultation and blasphemous boasting was redoubled.

‘So, all that you and your master can effect,’ cried he, ‘is to throw a little glamour on the sight – is to practise a little deception! I never weened the monkish art or profession to consist of more. See what my sovereign and master can do!’

‘Hold there,’ said the friar. ‘Who was it that made these mountains at the first? Was that deception?’

‘It was not thou,’ said the Master.

‘But who was it, then, that sent up your wicked seneschal into the stormy clouds in a flame of fire?’ added the friar. ‘And who was it that saved your life, but this morning, from a fiend that would have devoured you? Were these both deceptions?’

The Master’s countenance fell. The friar said this, because, in their present perilous situation, he wished to keep a little awe over the wizard, and likewise to put a stop to the torrent of blasphemy that proceeded from his lips.

The morning advanced, the sun arose, but no assistance, no relief appeared to our hapless prisoners. They had tasted nothing for a day and night, save one cup of wine each, and they had not above as much more remaining. For all this the Master was so much elated, that his behaviour was rather like that of a person frantic with joy, than that of one shut up among others to perish of hunger. His companions in misfortune noted likewise that he was again disposed to be peremptory and tyrannical with them, and they dreaded that his familiars were again at his command.

The men wrought all the forenoon endeavouring to break up the iron door; but they neither had mattocks nor room to work in, and they made no more impression on it than as many mice would have done. They were now

quite disconsolate; and, being unable to do aught else, they puzzled themselves in accounting for the late steward's motives for having locked it. They remembered that it was standing wide open when they brought him up a prisoner before the Master; and they likewise remembered of having seen him step into that stair for a minute or two, immediately before he began to brave the friar. Therefore, all that they could guess was, that it had been locked with some fatal intent.

The friar, perceiving that their efforts were vain, entreated them to come in from the open air, and keep themselves quiet and cheerful, that they might wear the longer. He trusted in Heaven, he said, that they would be delivered, but in the mean time it was absolutely necessary to use every precaution; and for that purpose, he added, if one of them would keep watch at each of the four windows, lest any passengers or countrymen should come near, he would tell them a story, which would at least have the good effect of keeping them quiet. The Master was quite delighted with this proposal; and, taking the flagon of wine, he proposed that they should share it among them; but the rest opposed it, and contented themselves with half a cup each.

Charlie was most of all cast down. He had heard a word from the friar that morning that sunk deep on his heart. It was something about eating one another! And not being able to get rid of the thought, he brought it again overhead. The rest were all struck dumb; for they perceived that it was but too apparent it might come to that. The Master grinned darkly, and said it was well. But Gibbie said he hoped, 'if things came that length, they wad draw cuts, that ilka ane might get a fair chance for his life.' The poet begged, with tears in his eyes, that, out of respect to the tender sex, they would leave Delany the last, or at least that, when the lot fell on her they would take him in her place. To this they all agreed with one voice: but an extraordinary thought striking on the Master's mind at that instant, he made a motion, and proposed to settle if off hand by a vote.

'This maid, whom you term beautiful, is mine on one condition,' said he; 'and as I can now in a very short time comply with that condition, I claim her as my own. I will therefore give her to the man among you who tells me the best tale. She shall be his, fully and freely, to do with her as seemeth him good. And the man among you who tells the worst shall, if need require it, be blooded and flayed in this same chamber for food to his associates.'

Charlie's blood ran cold within him at this proposal. He almost thought he felt the flaying knife and the teeth of the ravenous half-famished eaters; and when the Master called out, 'Approve, or not approve?' Charlie was the first to call out, 'O! Not! not, not!' He was seconded by Tam Craik, but all the rest voted on the other side; so that they were left in the minority, and the matter was finally decided to be precisely as the Master had proposed. The poet stretched himself, so eager was he to begin; for his heart yearned within him to win the beautiful Delany. Gibbie was also uplifted, and sure of victory; but Tam and Charlie were both quite hopeless and cast down.

CHAPTER 17

And I said unto him, Can’st thou tell unto thy servant what is the meaning of this?

Esdras

The friar having volunteered a tale, the priority was unanimously awarded to him: So, after the watches were set and all quiet, he began the following singular narrative, without further ceremony:

The Friar’s Tale

CHAPTER I

1. In the days of the years of my pilgrimage, it chanced to me that I sojourned in the great kingdom that is toward the south.
2. And I passed through the city that lieth on the river of the hills, unto the house of Galli the scribe, who was a good man and a just.
3. And he had one only daughter, who was unto him as a treasure and an heritage, for her mother had been led unto her people before the maid could distinguish between her right hand and her left.
4. And the maiden was fair to look upon;
5. For her neck was as polished ivory, and her chin like the ripened peach basking on a wall that looketh toward the south.
6. Her lips also were like the honeycomb; her teeth were rows of pearl, and her breath was as sweet smelling incense, and myrrh, and cassia.
7. Her eyes were brighter than the dew of heaven, and her hair was like the beams of the moon streaming through the white clouds that are in the firmament of air.
8. And I loved the maiden exceedingly; and my heart burned within me; and I became as a dead man.
9. And I wist not what to do, or what would become of me; for the vows of the Lord were on me that I could not wed; and I said, Woe is me, for

I am undone!

10. And I went in unto her, and communed with her of my great love; and when she had hearkened to my voice, she laughed me to scorn.
11. And I said, Why dost thou laugh me to scorn? Knowest thou not that I would lay down my life for thee? For I love thee so much above all things that are on earth, that I would even lick the dust from off thy feet.
12. And she said, What wouldst thou have me to do?
13. And I looked on my right hand, and on my left, and I communed with my heart.
14. And I perceived that the maid had asked aright, for I knew not what I would have her to do; and lo my countenance became abashed.
15. And she laughed at me exceedingly; yea she laughed at my calamity till the tears streamed from her eyes.
16. I said therefore unto myself that I would die, and be gathered unto my fathers; for how could I live to be a scorn and a derision, and to be burnt up as with a devouring flame? and I had many thoughts of unrighteousness dwelling in me.
17. And she told her father of these matters; and Galli the scribe was wroth with me, and said unto me, Why wouldst thou betray my daughter, the child of my age, and the hope of my grey hairs?
18. Is it not better for thee to depart unto thine own country, and to thy kindred, than commit this great wickedness?
19. And my spirit was grieved within me; nevertheless I could not depart, for my heart clove to the maid, and I loved her as my own soul.

CHAPTER II

1. And it came to pass that the army of the prince of the land encamped in that place;
2. For he was a great prince, and had increased his army; and he had captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens.
3. And these were clothed in gorgeous apparel, in brocade of gold, and in brocade of silver; and they were vain men, for they had the plumage of birds upon their heads, and gems of silver, and of gold, and of precious stones, on their breasts; and swords girded on their thighs.

4. And the damsel beheld them, and her heart danced with joy; yea, her eyes followed them whithersoever they went.
5. And I was more grieved than ever; therefore I counselled her, and said all manner of evil of the men.
6. But she would not hearken to my reproof, but cast all my counsel behind her back; and she derided me.
7. And it came to pass, in the process of time, that one of the captains of fifty came to her, and spoke kind words unto her, even great swelling words of vanity.
8. And she hearkened unto him, and her ears drunk in his burning speeches, even as the ox drinketh in water; and she delighted therein; and he looked into her eye, and behold he saw his own image impressed in it, as in a glass.
9. And he looked into it many times, and it grew brighter; and every time that he looked into it he saw his own image the more deeply and strongly reflected, until he knew that he lived in her heart.
10. But her image was not in his eye.
11. And I knew this, and was grieved. Therefore I withstood him to his face, and rebuked him; yea, and I also cursed him.
12. But the captain of fifty mocked me; he also told the maid, and she became wroth with me, so that, the two being combined against me, I could do nothing but sit down and weep.
13. And she gave unto him all that she had; yea she gave him until she had no more to give, for she gave unto him herself.
14. And her countenance was changed; her bright eyes retained not their wonted brightness; her voice was broken, and her tongue faltered in her mouth.
15. But the captain of fifty regarded it not; for he left her and went his way, and he did eat and drink, and made himself merry with wine.
16. And he said, What is a maiden that I should regard her? or for what were the daughters of women formed but for my pleasure?
17. And the prince of the kingdoms of the land sent unto his army, that they should go into a far country to fight against the enemies of their lord the king. And the men purposed to go; and the captain of fifty purposed to go also.
18. And when the maiden heard of it her heart failed within her, and she fell sick, and I feared it would be to death.

19. And I tried to comfort her; and I watched with her day and night, and prayed many prayers for her; but she became worse, for her spirit was wounded and cast down.
20. And Galli the scribe was also sorely afflicted, and he mourned exceedingly, saying, Alas! what shall I do for my daughter! she who was the hope of my age, and my only comfort here below. Wo is me, for she is dying of a lingering disease, and I shall be left childless! Now Galli the scribe knew not what the captain of fifty had done unto her, nor of all that she had given unto him.
21. So I went forth unto the host to seek this betrayer of women, and to speak peaceably with him, and to reason with him.
22. But he knew me afar off, and said to his brethren, Lo, here cometh that man of a strange country, let us make him our sport.
23. And they combined against me, and treated me with great indignity; for they bound my hands and put me into the river, and the flood carried me away, so that I said in mine heart, lo, I shall be drowned, for there is not one to pity or save me.
24. But they took me forth before my breath departed clean away; and they stripped me naked, and tied me to a stake, and scourged me.
25. And afterwards they stoned me out of the camp.
26. And I was very wroth, and went unto the captain of the host, and made my complaint known unto him.
27. And I said, O my lord, hearken unto the voice of thy servant. Behold one of your captains of fifty came unto the house of Galli the scribe.
28. And the man intreated him kindly, yet hath he betrayed his daughter, and refuseth to do her justice; and the maid will die, and her father, who is a good man, will go down to the grave with her.
29. And he answered and said unto me, What have I to do with this matter, or with thee? As a maid treadeth the wine press, so let her drink. It is not meet that I should be troubled with these things.
30. And I went away and wept bitterly, for I could find neither consolation nor redress; and I saw that the wickedness of the men was very great.
31. Then I went and trimmed my beard, and borrowed me a suit of armour; and I put an helmet of steel upon mine head, and a breast-plate upon my breast, and I girded on a sword.
32. And I went forth and challenged the captain of fifty to fight with me.

33. And I said in mine heart, Lo, I will fight this wicked man, and overcome him. And I will take his sword from him, and rend his armour from off his loins.
34. And then will I compel him to do justice to those whom he hath wronged, else will I smite off his head.
35. And we met by the side of the river; and he discerned me not through my disguise, for he said unto me, Who art thou, or what have I to say to thee?
36. And I said, For the wrong that thou hast done to the house of Galli the scribe have I called thee out to battle.
37. And he said, Thou hast done well. I will chastise thee as thou deservest, that thou mayest learn how to lift up thy hand against the servants of our lord the king.
38. So we fought; and his hand was sore against me.
39. For he drove me out of my place, and wounded me, and my hope had nearly perished.
40. But I prayed to the Lord for strength. And we fought again; and the combat was very sore that day, and he prevailed not against me.
41. And after the combat had lasted until my breath was spent, and my arm weary, by the help of the Lord I wounded him in the loins, so that my sword found a passage through his body, and he fell.
42. And I was sore afraid; and fled away, and hid myself; for I trembled at the thing I had done, because I perceived that the last case was worse than the first.
43. And when the soldiers came to him, he said that Galli the scribe had sent out ruffians to slay him.
44. And when these things were told to the captain of the host, he was exceedingly wroth, and he sent forth men to destroy the house of Galli the scribe, and to slay him, and take his substance for a prey.
45. And the captain of fifty died that night; and they buried him with great lamentation, for they wept over him, saying, Alas! our brother! for he hath been cut off before his time.

CHAPTER III

1. And it came to pass, that after I had laid aside my armour, and put on my pilgrim weeds, that I went forth into the plain, and into the city.

2. And when I heard the words of the captain of the host, and the command that he had given, I hasted to the house of Galli the scribe, and said unto him, Go to, put up all thy money, and thy jewels, and fly for thy life, for behold evil is determined concerning thee.
3. But he would not hearken to my voice; for he said, I have done no man wrong.
4. And I intreated him, but prevailed not.
5. Therefore I went unto his daughter, and told her of what I had heard; and I said, Rise up, make haste and escape, for the soldiers will abuse thee.
6. And she was afraid, and said unto me, Take me, and hide me for a short time, for thy words have never deceived me.
7. And I hid her in a palm tree, and remained with her.
8. And the men who belonged to the captain of fifty, even to him whom I slew in battle, came as they were commanded; and they entered into the possessions of Galli the scribe, and they took all that he had for a prey, and burned his house with fire.
9. And we beheld all from our hiding-place, and were greatly astonished; for we saw Galli the scribe flying through the garden, and the soldiers pursuing hard after him, with their swords drawn.
10. And when his daughter saw it she shrieked and fainted away; and when the men heard her voice they looked about, and some of them ran into the arbour, but they found her not, therefore they pursued after Galli the scribe.
11. And I trembled sore, for I knew not if we were discovered, neither could I support the maiden in her seat.
12. For she beheld whose men they were that pursued after her father to slay him, and she deemed that her captain of fifty had sent out his fifty to devour them, yea to destroy, and to slay, and to ravage; and there was no more spirit in her.
13. And I prayed to the Lord my God out from among the branches of the palm tree, and he heard my voice.
14. For the spoilers came, and they sought, but they found us not.
15. For their eyes were blinded that they could not see. We beheld their eyes, and heard the threatenings that proceeded out of their mouths, yet could they not perceive us.

16. And their threatenings were filled with the abominations of iniquity, for the men were very wicked.
17. And I took her out of the palm tree by night; and I covered her with my sackcloth gown, and we tried to fly and make our escape, but she could not; therefore my distress was very great.
18. And I carried her to the house of a poor widow in the suburbs of the city, and I concealed her there till her strength should recover.
19. And I went about making many inquiries; and I heard that the soldiers had taken Galli the scribe, and had given him up to be persecuted, and tormented, and slain; also that the whole army were abroad searching to recover his daughter, to execute vengeance on her.
20. And I was grieved for that I had done, and for bringing evil on those I loved; for I knew that the men of the host spoiled the people, and did according to their will.
21. So I borrowed me a pilgrim's robes, and in these I equipped the maiden; and when she was clothed in her flowing sackcloth gown, with her cross, scallop, and shell, behold I myself could not discern her.
22. And we escaped from the city by night, and journeyed toward the north, and at break of day we came to the fords of the great river, where we were encountered by three of the soldiers of the guard, who waylaid us.
23. And I said unto them, Whom seek ye? And they said, We be sent out to seek the daughter of Galli the scribe, for she hath betrayed one of the captains into her nets, and hath robbed him, and also caused him to be cut off from his men; therefore are we sent out to take her, that she may be delivered into the hands of his men, that they may do to her as seemeth good in their eyes.
24. And the maiden trembled, so that the men beheld it; and I turned and said unto her, Said I not that it was so?
25. And I said furthermore, Sit thee down, my brother, until we converse with these men, for they are good men, and filled with wisdom; and lo, have not I strange things to relate unto them?
26. And the men sat down, and we sat down beside them.
27. And I said, We are pilgrims and strangers, and come from a far country. And they said, Peace be unto you.

28. And I said, moreover, that it was given unto me to dream dreams, and to see visions, and that I had a vision of my head upon my bed, which was of this Galli the scribe of whom they spake.
29. For I saw and beheld that he had put forth his hand on a captain of the servants of my lord the king, and had sent forth his bravadoes, who had wounded him until the sword passed through him, even from the left side unto the right. And the men said, Is not this wonderful?
30. And behold I saw the servants of my lord the king enter the dwelling of the man, even of the scribe, and take his goods, and him they pursued with the edge of the sword, and took by the vineyard as thou goest down towards a river.
31. And they burned his house with fire, so that the flames ascended up on high; and his daughter who was sick, and concealed in an inner chamber, her also did they burn until she was quite consumed.
32. And the men wondered exceedingly; and they bowed down their heads and said, Thou hast told unto us strange things. It is even as thou hast said. Go on your way.
33. And I blessed them; and they returned to tell unto their captains the wonderful things which they had heard.
34. And I fled with the damsel until I came to the sea; and when we had found a ship we went into it, and I brought her to my own country, but not to my kindred, for I placed her in the holy isle near the river of the north.
35. And she mourned night and day for her father, and also for the captain of fifty, whom she called her husband; for she dreaded that some evil had befallen unto him.
36. For, on the day that he had sworn to her, he had given her a graven image, which she kept hid in her bosom, and she wept over it and kissed it.
37. And I was grieved, and rebuked her, but she refused to be comforted; and I went and came and brought her of the good things of the land, for I loved her as the breath of my nostrils.
38. And when the days of her months were fulfilled, behold she brought forth a daughter.
39. And the babe was also beautiful to look upon. And the bosom of the mother yearned over her child, and she called her by her father’s name, even by the name of the captain of fifty.

40. And she kissed her child, and wept over it day and night; but the frame and substance of her body were wasted away with perpetual grief, and I saw that the child would die.
41. And when I saw the countenance that was once beautiful as the morning bathed in tears, as her babe lay at a breast in which there was no nourishment, I was exceedingly sorry even unto death.
42. And lo, I took the child and nourished it; yea I fed it with bread and with wine, with butter also, and with honey and milk from the beasts of the field; and the child was restored.
43. But the mother decayed like a flower that is cut down; for the winds of grief had passed over her, and her spirit was consumed. The summer came, and all the herbs of the field were renewed, but the fairest flower of the land was bending down to meet the clay.

CHAPTER IV

1. And it came also to pass that as soon as I found myself in a land of safety, I wrote many letters to Galli the scribe; for I said, Peradventure he may escape out of their hands.
2. I wrote also to the chief of our order, giving account of the whole matter, and attesting the innocence of Galli the scribe.
3. But no answer came to me, therefore was I sore distressed; for I said, If the mother and babe both perish, what shall become of me?
4. And one day as I sat with the babe on my knee, I beheld, and, lo, the eyes of the mother were fixed mournfully on her babe, and she lifted them to my face, and looked at her babe again.
5. And I could not contain myself; so I lifted up my voice and wept bitterly.
6. But she smiled, and said, Wherefore shouldst thou weep? Behold, am not I in the hand of the Lord? And my child, the daughter of my youth, and of my love, thou also art in the hands of thy Maker.
7. May he lead thee, and guide thee, and keep thee from the snares in which thy mother hath fallen.
8. Though thou hast lost thy father, as I also have lost mine, yet hast thou a Father in Heaven who will not forsake thee. Neither shalt thou altogether lack a father’s care here below.
9. And she said to me, Is it not even so?

10. And I could not answer her, for I wept aloud; yea, I even wept until the child grew affrighted, and wept also.
11. And the mother took the graven image from her neck, and from her bosom; and she kissed it, and hung it round the neck of her babe.
12. And she said, It is the image and likeness of thy father, wear it, my child, till the day of thy death.
13. Peradventure thou mayest fall among his people, and among his kindred, for they were men of honour and renown.
14. And she kissed her child, and said, Now shall I be taken from thee, and go to my grave, and they will bury me, my babe, among strangers, and there is none of my people to shed a tear over me.
15. And we all wept abundantly, and shed many tears.
16. And while we yet cried aloud, lifting up our voices, behold one entered in, and said, Peace be with you!
17. And I discerned him not, for mine eyes flowed like two fountains of water.
18. But the woman cried out, and sprang from her couch, and she clasped her arms around his neck, and said, My father! my father!
19. And behold it was Galli the scribe.
20. And the woman said, Now hath my child found a father indeed.
21. And he said, Blessed and happy mayest thou be, my daughter, for I bring thee joyful tidings, and blessed be this man who hath befriended and saved thee. His intercession hath also saved the life of thy father; all that was mine hath been restored to me, yea, and more also.
22. And I will give all unto thee and to thy child after thee, and thou shalt have riches and honours in thy own country, and among thy own people.
23. But his daughter answered him not, for the words died on her tongue; but she looked in his face and smiled, and then she looked at her babe as it lay on my knee.
24. And Galli the scribe was sore amazed, and said, What aileth thee, my daughter? and why answerest thou not to the words of thy father?
25. And he held her in his arms, and her hands were clasped around his neck that they would not be loosed.
26. And behold there was a sound like a small voice issued from her mouth, and the light of her eyes became dim, and her head fell back over the arm of her father.

27. And her gentle spirit departed away unto him that gave it; for she spoke no more, neither breathed she any more.
28. And we buried her in the isle of the holy place, and mourned for her many days.
29. And I besought of Galli the scribe that he would leave the child with me, that I might bring her up in our convent, and breed her in the ways of purity and truth.
30. But he refused, and said, I cannot part with the child of my only daughter; she shall go with me and be the heiress of all that I possess.
31. And after I had blessed him, he departed with the little maid to go to his own land, and I saw them no more.
32. For after many years had elapsed, I went again into the country beyond the river, and I visited the house of Galli the scribe.
33. But behold he had never returned to that place; and the people of the land reported unto me, that he fell among thieves, and was slain, and the babe was slain with him, or led into captivity.
34. The ways of heaven are unsearchable, and the hand of man often worketh out its decrees. But for the misfortunes that befel the house of Galli the scribe will I go mourning till the day of my death.

CHAPTER 18

Beef steaks and bacon hams
I can eat as lang's I'm able,
Cutlets, chops, and mutton pies;
Pork's the king o' a' the table!

Fragment of an old Bacchanalian Song

'It has made my heart very sair that tale,' said Charlie; 'I wish you hadna tauld it.'

'I think it is nae tale ata',' said Tam Craik: 'If I coudna hae tauld a better tale than that, I wad never hae begun. I could now wager sax merks, and sax brass mowdiworts to boot, that the Gospel-friar is the man that shall be the first to thole the knife. And what for should he no? He'll make the best mart amang us.'

'I differ widely from you,' said the poet, 'with regard to the merits of the tale. I love the friar for telling it; and I love him ten times better for the part he took in the transaction. How I do admire the love that has no selfish flaw, no moiety of sense to prompt its aberrations! Should I ever get free from this vile pinnacle – this grave in altitude – I'll search the world for that dear child, and find her too, if in the world she be.'

'Alas! I have searched, and searched in vain,' answered the friar. 'It was so long before I knew of the mishap of my friend, and my darling child, that all memory of the transaction was lost. I would travel from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, to find out that dear, that beloved maiden; and could I find her I would yet put her in possession of the inheritance of her father. For I have instructed the heads of our order, and they are preserving it in their own hands as the patrimony of the orphan and the fatherless.'

During the time of the friar's narrative, Delany had been sitting close by his knee in fixed and earnest attention; and at this time there chancing to be

a pause in the conversation, she looked wistfully about, as if afraid she was going to commit herself by telling a lie. But there was such a beam of intelligence playing over her lovely countenance, that all the party fixed their eyes on her, as if watching with the deepest interest what she was going to say.

'I have a confused dream of having heard something of this story before,' said she: 'but subsequent events had quite obliterated the traces of it from my memory, till this narrative renewed them: I think I can give you some intelligence of this lost maiden. You said she was called by her father's name. Do you recollect what that father of hers was called?'

'Ay, that I will never forget while memory retains her seat in this repentant bosom,' said the friar. 'His name was Captain Jacques De-la-Veny.'

'The very same,' said the maid. 'Then do you know ought of this? Or did you ever see it before?' – and she took a small miniature from her bosom, holding it near to the friar's eye.

'By the blessed stars of heaven, and the Holy Virgin that rules above them!' exclaimed the friar; 'it is the graven image of the captain of fifty whom I slew in battle. I saw it placed in thy bosom, yea I held thee on my knee till that chain of gold was locked about thy neck never to be removed. Thou art indeed the daughter of the fairest and the comeliest among women – of her whom I loved far above my own life, and for whom I travailled in pain; yea, thou art the child that I nursed and held on my knee, and all the inheritance of thy father's is thine. Blessed be thou, my daughter! and blessed be they who have preserved thee! Come to my bosom my child, my beloved, my fair one, that I may fall on thy neck, and bless thee, and weep over thee; for my soul rejoiceth that I have found thee.'

The poet could stand it no longer; he threw himself at the maiden's feet, and embraced them, and wept aloud. Charlie was busied in drawing pictures of swords and cross-bows on the floor with the brazen end of his sheathe, and always giving a loud sob as if his heart would burst. Even Master Michael Scott once drew the back of his hand across his eyes, though no one believed it was ought of sympathy that affected him.

'The abbreviation of the name was so natural in the mouths of the people of this land,' said the friar, 'that I wonder I should never have recognised it, nor yet on the face of my dear child the features of her mother. Hard has

been thy lot, and the lot of thy fathers, but blessings may yet remain in store for thee.'

'I dinna see where they're to come frae,' said Charlie, sighing louder than ever. 'It wad be the hardest thing I ever kend, if ane sae young, sae bonnie, and sae good, after a' that she has borne, should be prickit up atween the yird and the heaven here, to be hungered to dead, and then eaten wi' the corbies.'

'Life's sweet to us a',' said Gibbie: 'She wad be as little missed as ony that's here, if she *should* be starved to death wi' hunger.'

'She shall *not* be starved to death wi' hunger;' cried Charlie, in a tone of valiant desperation. 'Na, na; afore she die o' hunger after a' she has come through, I'll rather cut a limb off my ain body and feed her wi't. An Corbie be spared, I can e'en ride by the warden's side wi' a timmer ane.'

'God bless you, for a kind heart,' cried the poet.

'Gin I thought I were to win her mysel,' said Tam, 'and win away wi' life out o' this luckless place, I wad do a good deal for her; but if I trowed ony o' you were to get her frae me – I'll no tell you how I feel.'

'Just as a hungry man should feel,' said Gibbie; 'and as ane wha has starvation afore his een maun feel. It is e'en a sair trial, and often brings me a-mind o' the story of Marion Gib's callant.'

Master Michael Scott, thinking that, in right of seniority, the Laird was now about to begin his trial story for life or death, made a signal with his hand for his guests to compose themselves, which they did with one consent; while Gibbie, pleased with the mark of deference shown to him, went on: –

Laird of Beatstactnowe's Tale

There wad aiblins nane o' you ken Marion. She lived i' the Dod-Shiel; and had a callant to the lang piper, him that Squire Ridley's man beat at the Peel-hill meeting. Weel, you see, he was a gilliegaupy of a callant, gayan like the dad o' him; for Marion said he wad hae eaten a horse ahint the saddle; and as her shieling wasna unco weel stored o' meat, she had ill getting him mainteened; till at the lang and the last it just came to this pass, that whenever Jock was i' the house, it was a constant battle atween Marion and him. Jock fought to be at meat, and Marion to keep him frae it, and

mony hard clouts and claws there past. They wad hae foughten about a haggis, or a new kirning o' butter, for a hale hour, and the battle generally endit in Jock's getting a', or a good share o' ilka thing. (I wish we had sic things here, even though we had to fight for them!) When he had fairly gained the possession, by whatever means, he feasted with the greatest satisfaction, licking his large ruddy lips, and looking all about him with eyes of the utmost benevolence. Marion railed all the while that the poor lad was enjoying himself, without any mercy and restraint, and there wasna a vile name under the sun that had ony signification of a glutton in it, that she didna ca' him by. Jock took the bite wi' the buffet; – he heard a' the ill names, and munched away. Oh, how his heart did rejoice o'er a fat lunch o' beef, a good haggis, or even a cog o' milk brose! Poor fellow! such things were his joy and delight. So he snapped them up, and in two or three hours after he was as ready for another battle as ever.

This was a terrible life to lead. Times grew aye the langer the waur; and Marion was obliged to hire poor Jock to Goodman Niddery, to herd his kye and his pet sheep. Jock had nae thoughts at a' o' ganging to sic a job at first; but Marion tauld him ilka day o' the fat beef, the huge kebbucks, and the parridge sae thick that a horn-spoon wadna delve into them, till he grew impatient for the term day. That day came at length, and Marion went away hame wi' her son to introduce him. The road was gayan lang, and Jock's crappin began to craw. He speered a hunder times about the meat at Goodman Niddery's house, and every answer that Marion gae was better than the last, till Jock believed he was gaun hame to a continual feast. It was a delightful thought, for the craving appetite within him was come to a great height. They reached the place, and went into the kitchen. Jock's een were instantly on the look-out; but they didna need to range far. Above the fire there hung two sides of bacon more than three inches deep of fat, besides many other meaner objects: The hind legs of bullocks, sheep, and deer, were also there; but these were withered, black, and sapless in appearance. Jock thought the very substance was dried out o' them. But the bacon! How it did make Jock smack his lips! It was so juicy that even the brown bristly skin on the outside of it was all standing thick o' eenbright beaming drops like morning dew. Jock was established at Goodman Niddery's; he would not have flitted again and left these two sides of bacon hanging there for an estate. Marion perceived well where the sum of his desires was fixed, and

trembled for fear of an instant attack: Well might she; for Jock had a large dirk or sheathed knife (a very useful weapon) that he wore, and that he took twice out of its place, looked at its edge, and then at the enormous bacon ham, which was more than three inches deep of solid fat, with the rich drops of juice standing upon the skin. Jock drew his knife on his sandal, then on the edge of a wooden table that stood beside him, examined the weapon's edge again, and again fixed his green eyes on the bacon. 'What do the people mean,' thought he to himself, 'that they do not instantly slice down a portion of that glorious meat, and fry it on the coals? Would they but give me orders to do it – would they even give me the least hint, how slashingly I would obey!'

None of them had the good sense to give Jock ony sic orders. He was two or three times on the very point of helping himself, and at last got up on his feet, it was believed, for the sole purpose of making an attack on the bacon ham, when, behold, in came Goodman Niddery.

'There's your master, sirrah!' whispered Marion, 'haste ye and whup aff your bonnet.'

Jock looked at him. There was something very severe and forbidding in his countenance; so Jock's courage failed him, and he even took aff his bonnet, and sat down with that in his one hand and the drawn knife in the other. Marion's heart was greatly relieved, and she now ventured on a little conversation:

'I hae brought you hame my lad, Goodman, and I hope he'll be a good servant to you.'

'I coudna say, Marion: Gin he be as gude as you ca'ed him, he'll do. I think he looks like ane that winna be behind at his bicker.'

'Ay, weel I wat, Goodman, and that's true; and I wadna wish it were otherwise. Slaw at the meat, slaw at the wark, ye ken.'

'That *is* a good hint o' my mother's!' thinks Jock to himsel: 'What though I should show the auld niggard a sample? The folk o' this house surely hae nae common sense.'

The dinner was now, however, set down on the kitchen-table. The goodman sat at the head, the servants in a row on each side, and Jock and his mother at the foot. The goodwife stood behind her servants, and gave all their portions. The dinner that day consisted of broad bannocks, as hard as horn, a pail of thin sour milk, called whig, and a portion of a large kebbuck

positively as dry as wood. Jock was exceedingly dissatisfied, and could not but admire the utter stupidity of the people, and their total want of all proper distinction. He thought it wonderful that rational creatures should not know what was good for them. He munched, and munched, and gnawed at the hard bread and cheese, till his jaws were sore; but he never once looked at the food before him; but leaning his cheek on his hand to rest his wearied grinders somewhat at every bite he took, and every splash of the sour shilpy milk that he lapped in, he lifted his eyes to the fat bacon ham with the juice standing on it in clear bells.

Marion wished herself fairly out of the house, for she perceived there would be an outbreak; and to prepare the good people for whatever might happen, she said before going away – 'Now, goodwife, my callant's banes are green, and he's a fast growing twig; I want to ken if he will get plenty o' meat here.'

'I winna answer for that, Marion; – he shall fare as the lave fare; but he's maybe no very easily served. There are some misleared servants wha think they never get enough.'

'Tell me this thing, then, goodwife; will he see enough?'

'Ay; I shall answer for that part o't.'

'Then I shall answer for the rest, goodwife.'

Jock had by this time given up contending with the timber cheese, and the blue sour milk, and, taking a lug of a bannock in his hand, the size of a shoe sole, he went away and sat down at the fireside, where he had a full view of the bacon ham, three inches thick of fat, with the dew standing on its brown skin.

The withered bread swallowed rather the better of this delicious sight; so Jock chewed and looked, and looked and chewed, till his mother entered into the security mentioned. 'That is a capital hint,' thought Jock; 'I shall verify my good mother's cautionry, for I can stand this nae langer.' He sprang up on a seat, sliced off a large flitch of bacon, and had it on the coals before one had time to pronounce a word; and then turning his back to it, and his face to the company, he stood with his drawn dirk quite determined to defend his prey.

The goodwife spoke first up. 'Gudeness have a care o' us! see to the menseless tike!' cried she; 'I declare the creature has na the breeding o' a whalp!'

Jock was well used to such kind of epithets; so he bore this and some more with the utmost suavity, still, however, keeping his ground.

Goodman Niddery grinned, and his hands shook with anger, as if struck with a palsy; but for some reason or other he did not interfere. The servants were like to burst with laughter; and Jock kept the goodwife at bay with his drawn knife, till his slice was roasted; and then, laying it flat on his dry piece of bread, he walked out to the field to enjoy it more at leisure. Marion went away home; and the goodman and goodwife both determined to be revenged on Jock, and to make him pay dear for his audacity.

Jock gave several long looks after Marion as she vanished on Kettlemoor, but he had left no kind of meat in her shieling when he came away, else it was likely he would have followed his mother home again. He was still smacking his lips after his rich repast, and he had seen too much good stuff about the house of his new master to leave it at once; so he was even fain to bid Marion good-b'ye in his heart, wipe the filial tear from his eye, poor man, and try to reconcile himself to his new situation.

'Do you carry aye that lang gully knife about wi' you, master cowherd, or how do they ca' ye?' said his master, when they next met after the adventure of the bacon.

'I hae aye carried it yet,' said Jock, with great innocence; 'and a gay gude whittle it is.'

'Ye maun gie that up,' said Niddery; 'we dinna suffer chaps like you to carry sic weapons about our house.'

Jock fixed his green eyes on his master's face. He could hardly believe him to be serious; still there was something in his look he did not like; so he put his knife deeper into his pocket, drew one step back, and, putting his under row of teeth in front of those above, waited the issue of such an unreasonable demand.

'Come, come; give it up I say. Give it to me; I'll dispose of it for you.'

'I'll see you at the bottom o' the place my mother speaks about whiles,' thought Jock to himself, 'afore I gi'e my gully either to you or ony that belangs to you.' He still kept his former position, however, and the same kind of look at his master's face, only his een grew rather greener.

'Won't you give it up, you stubborn thief? Then I will take it, and give you a good drubbing into the bargain.'

When Jock heard this, he pulled out his knife. ‘That is a good lad to do as you are bidden,’ said his master. But Jock, instead of delivering up his knife, drew it from the sheathe, which he returned to his pocket. ‘Now I sal only say this,’ said he; ‘the first man that tries to take my ain knife frae me – he may do it – but he shall get the length o’t in his monyplies first.’ So saying, he drew back his hand with a sudden jerk.

Goodman Niddery gave such a start that he actually leaped off the ground, and holding up both his hands, exclaimed, ‘What a savage we have got here! what a satan!’ And without speaking another word he ran away to the house, and left Jock standing with his drawn knife in his hand.

The goodman’s stomach burned with revenge against Jock; so that night he sent him supperless to bed, out of requital for the affair of the fat bacon; and next day the poor boy was set down to a very scanty breakfast, which was not fair. His eye turning invariably to one delicious object, the goodman perceived well what was passing in his heart; and, on some pretence, first sent away all the servants and then the goodwife. He next rose up himself, with his staff in his hand, and, going slowly away into the little parlour, said, as he went through the kitchen, ‘What can be become o’ a’ the fo’k?’ and with that entered the dark door that opened in a corner. He made as though he had shut the door, but he turned about within it and peeped back.

The moment that he vanished was the watch-word for Jock; he sprang from his seat at the bottom of the table, and, mounting a form, began to whang away at the bacon ham. Some invidious bone, or hard object of some sort, coming unfortunately in contact with the edge of his knife, his progress was greatly obstructed; and though he cut and sawed with all his might, before he succeeded in separating a piece of about two pounds weight from the main body, his master had rushed on him from his concealment, and, by one blow of his staff, laid him flat on the floor. The stroke was a sore one, for it was given with extreme good will, and deprived Jock of sensibility for the time being. He and his form both came down with a great rumble, but the knife remained buried in the fat bacon ham; and the inveterate goodman was not satisfied with felling the poor lad, but kicked him, and laid on him with his stick after he was down. The goodwife at length came running, and put a stop to this cruelty; and fearing

the boy was murdered, and that they would be hanged for it, she got assistance, and soon brought Jock again to himself.

Jock had been accustomed to fight for his meat, and, in some measure laid his account with it, so that, on the whole, he took his broken head as little to heart as could have been expected – certainly less than any other boy of the same age would have done. It was only a little more rough than he had been prepared to look for; but had he succeeded in his enterprise, he would not have been ill content. The goodwife and her maids had laid him on a kitchen bed and bathed his temples; and on recovering from stupefaction, the first thing he did was to examine his pockets to see if he had his gully. Alak! there was nothing but the empty sheathe. Then he *did* lose the field, and fell a blubbering and crying. The goodwife thought he was ill, and tried to sooth him by giving him some meat. He took the meat of course, but his heart was inconsolable; till, just when busy with his morsel, his eye chanced to travel to the old place as if by instinct, and there he beheld the haft of his valued knife sticking in the bacon ham, its blade being buried deep in sappy treasures. He sprang over the bed, and traversing the floor with staggering steps, mounted a form, and stretched forth his hand to possess himself again of his gully.

'Aih! Gudeness have a care o' us,' cried the goodwife; 'saw ever ony body the like o' that? The creature's bacon mad! Goodman! goodman, come here!'

Jock, however, extricated his knife and fled, though he could scarcely well walk. Some of the maids averred that he at the same time slid a corner of the ham into his pocket; but it is probable they belied him, for Jock had been munching in the bed but the moment before.

He then went out to his cows, weak as he was. He had six cows, some mischievous calves, and ten sheep to herd; and he determined to take good care of these, as also, now that he had got his knife again, not to want his share of the good things about the house, of which he saw there was abundance. However, several days came and went, and Jock was so closely watched by his master and mistress all the time he was in the house, that he could get nothing but his own scanty portion. What was more, Jock was obliged every day to drive his charge far a-field, and remain with them from morn till evening. He got a few porridge in the morning, and a hard bannock and a bottle of sour milk to carry along with him for his dinner.

This miserable meal was often despatched before eleven o'clock, so that poor Jock had to spend the rest of the day in fasting, and contriving grand methods of obtaining some good meat in future.

There was one thing very teasing: He had a small shieling, which some former herd had built, and plenty of sticks to burn for the gathering or cutting. He had thus a fire every day, without any thing to roast on it. Jock sat over it often in the most profound contemplation, thinking how delightfully a slice of bacon would fry on it – how he would lay the slice on his hard bannock, and how the juice would ooze out of it! Never was there a man who had richer prospects than Jock had: still his happiness lay only in perspective. But experience teaches man wisdom, and wisdom points out to him many expedients.

Among Jock's fat sheep there was one fat ewe lamb, the flower of the flock, which the goodwife and the goodman both loved and valued above all the rest. She was as beautiful and playful as innocence itself, and, withal, *as fat as she could lie in her skin*. There was one rueful day, and a hungry one, that Jock had sat long over his little fire of sticks, pondering on the joys of fat flesh. He went out to turn his mischievous calves, whose nebs were never out of an ill deed, and at that time they had strayed into the middle of a corn field. As bad luck would have it, by the way he perceived this dawted ewe lamb lying asleep in the sun; and, out of mere frolic, as any other boy would have done, he flew on above her and tried if he could hold her down. After hard struggling he mastered her, took her between his feet, stroked her snowy fleece and soft downy cheek, and ever, as he patted her, repeated these words, 'O but ye be a bonny beast!'

The lamb, however, was not much at her ease; she struggled a little now and then, but finding that it availed not, she gave it over; and seeing her comrades feeding near her, she uttered some piteous bleats. They could afford her no assistance, but they answered her in the same tremulous key. After patting her a good while, Jock began to handle her breast and ribs, and found that she was in good earnest *as fat as pork*. This was a ticklish experiment for the innocent lamb. Jock was seized with certain inward longings and yearnings that would not be repressed. He hesitated long, long, and sometimes his pity awoke – but there was another natural feeling that proved the stronger of the two; so Jock at length took out his long knife and unsheathed it. Next he opened the fleece on the lamb's throat till its

bonny white skin was laid bare, and not a hair of wool to intervene between it and the point of his knife. He was again seized with deep remorse, as he contemplated the lamb's harmless and helpless look; so he wept aloud, and tried to put his knife again into its sheathe, but he could not.

To make a long tale short, Jock took away the lamb's life, and that not in the most gentle or experienced way. She made no resistance, and only uttered one bleat. 'Poor beast!' said Jock; 'I daresay ye like this very ill, but I canna help it. Ye are suffering for a' your bits o' ill done deeds now.'

The day of full fruition and happiness for Jock was now arrived. Before evening he had roasted and eaten the kidneys, and almost the whole of the draught or pluck. His heart rejoiced within him, for never was there more delicious food. But the worst of it was, that the devils of calves were going all the while in the middle of a corn field, which his master saw from the house, and sent one running all the way to turn them. The man had also orders to 'waken the dirty blackguard callant if he was sleeping, and gie him his licks.'

Jock was otherwise employed; but, as luck would have it, the man did not come into his hut, nor discover his heinous crime; for Jock met him among the corn, and took a drubbing with all proper decorum.

But dangers and suspicions encompassed poor Jock now on every side. He sat down to supper at the bottom of the board with the rest of the servants, but he could not eat a single morsel. His eyes were not fixed on the bacon ham as usual, and moreover they had quite lost that sharp green gleam for which they were so remarkable. These were circumstances not to be overlooked by the sharp eyes of his master and mistress.

'What's the matter wi' the bit dirty callant the night?' said the latter. 'What ails you, sirrah, that you hae nae ta'en your supper? Are you weel eneugh?'

Jock wasna ill, he said; but he could not enter into particulars about the matter any farther. The goodman said, he feared the blade had been stealing, for he did not kythe like ane that had been fasting a' day; but after the goodwife and he had examined the hams, kebbucks, beef barrel, meal girnel, and every place about the house, they could discern nothing amissing, and gave up farther search, but not suspicion.

Jock trembled lest the fat lamb might be missed in the morning when he drove out his flock, but it was never remarked that the lamb was a-wanting.

He took very little breakfast, but drove his kine and sheep, and the devils of calves, away to the far field, and hasted to his wee housie. He borrowed a coal every day from a poor woman, who lived in a cot at the road side, to kindle his fire, and that day she noticed, what none else had done, that his coat was all sparked over with blood, and asked him of the reason. Jock was rather startled by the query, and gave her a very suspicious look, but no other answer.

'I fear ye hae been battling wi' some o' your neighbours,' said she.

This was a great relief for Jock's heart. 'Ay, just that,' said he, and went away with his coal.

What a day of feasting Jock had! He sliced and roasted, and roasted and ate till he could hardly walk. Once when the calves were going into a mischief, which they were never out of, he tried to run, but he could not run a foot; so he was obliged to lie down and roll himself on the ground, take a sleep, and then proceed to work again.

There was nutrition in the very steams that issued from Jock's hut; the winds that blew over it carried health and savoury delight over a great extent of country. A poor hungry boy that herded a few lean cows on an adjoining farm, chancing to come into the track of this delicious breeze, became at once like a statue. He durst not move a step for fear of losing the delicious scent; and there he stood with his one foot before the other, his chin on his right shoulder, his eyes shut and his mouth open, his nose being pointed straight to Jock's wee housie. The breeze still grew richer, till at last it led him as straight as there had been a hook in his nose to Jock's shieling; so he popped in, and found Jock at the sublime employment of cooking and eating. The boy gaped and stared at the mangled body of the lamb, and at the rich repast that was going on; but he was a very ignorant and stupid boy, and could not comprehend any thing; so Jock fed him with a good fat piece well roasted, and let him go again to his lean cows.

Jock looked very plump and thriving-like that night; his appearance was quite sleek, somewhat resembling that of a young voluptuary; and, to lull suspicion, he tried to take some supper, but not one bite or soap was he able to swallow. The goodwife, having by that time satisfied herself that nothing was stolen, became concerned about Jock, and wanted him to swallow some physic, which he peremptorily refused to do.

‘How can the puir thing tak ony meat?’ said she. ‘He’s a’ swalled i’ the belly. Indeed I rather suspect that he’s swalled o’er the hale body.’

The next morning, as Jock took out his drove, the goodman was standing at the road side to look at them. Jock’s heart grew cold, as well it might, when the goodman called out to him, ‘Callant, what hae you made o’ the gude lamb?’

‘Is she no there?’ said Jock, after a long pause, for he was so much astounded that he could not speak at the first.

‘Is she no there!’ cried the goodman again in great wrath, imitating Jock’s voice; ‘If ye binna blind, ye may see that. But I can tell you, my man, gin ye hae letten ought happen to that lamb, ye had better never hae been born.’

‘What can be comed o’ the beast?’ said Jock; ‘I had better look the house, she’s may be stayed in by herself.’

Jock didna wait for an order, but, glad to be a little farther off from his master, he ran back and looked the fold and sheephouse, and every nettle bush around them, as he had been looking for a lost knife.

‘I can see naething o’ her,’ said he, as he came slounging back, hanging his head, and keeping aloof from the goodman, who still carried his long pike staff in his hand.

‘But I’ll mak you see her, and find her baith, hang-dog,’ said he; ‘or deil be in my fingers an I dinna twist your neck about. Are you sure you had her yestreen?’

O yes! Jock was sure he had her yestreen. The women were examined if they had observed her as they milked the cows. They could not tell. None of them had seen her; but they could not say she was not there. All was in commotion about the steading, for the loss of the dawted pet lamb, which was a favourite with every one of the family.

Jock drove his cattle and nine sheep to the field – roasted a good collop or two of his concealed treasure, and snapped them up, but found that they did not relish so well as formerly; for now that his strong appetite for fat flesh was somewhat allayed, yea even fed to loathing, he wished the lamb alive again: He began, moreover, to be in great bodily fear; and to provide against the probability of any discovery being made, he lifted the mangled remains of his prey, and conveyed them into an adjoining wood, where he covered them carefully up with withered leaves, and laid thorns above

them, ‘Now!’ said Jock, as he left the thicket, ‘let them find that out wha can.’

The goodman went to all the herds around enquiring after his lamb, but could hear no intelligence of her till he came to the cottage of poor Bessie, the old woman that had furnished Jock with a coal every day. When he put the question to her, the rock and the lint fell out of Bessie’s hand, and she sat a while quite motionless.

‘What war ye saying, goodman? War ye saying ye had lost your bonnie pet lamb?’

‘Even sae, Bessie.’

‘Then, goodman, I fear you will never see her living again. What kind o’ callant is that ye hae gotten? He’s rather a suspicious looking chap. I tentit his claes a’ spairged wi’ blude the tither day, and baith this and some days bygane he has brought in his dinner to me, saying that he dought nae eat it.’

Goodman Niddery could make no answer to this, but sat for a while grumphing and groaning as some late events passed over his mind; particularly how Jock’s belly was swollen, and how he could not take any supper. But yet the idea that the boy had killed his favourite, and eaten her, was hardly admissible: the deed was so atrocious he could not conceive any human being capable of it, strong as circumstances were against his carnivorous herd. He went away with hurried and impatient steps to Jock’s wee house, his old colley dog trotting before him, and his long pike-staff in his hand. Jock eyed him at a distance, and kept out of his path, pretended to be engaged in turning the calves to a right pasture, and running and threshing them with a long goad; for though they were not in any mischief then, he knew that they would soon be in some.

The goodman no sooner set his nose within Jock’s shieling than he was convinced some horrid deed had been done. It smelled like a cook’s larder; and, moreover, his old dog, who had a very good scent, was scraping among the ashes, and picking up fragments of something which he seemed very much to enjoy. Jock did not know what to do when he saw how matters stood, yet he still had hopes that nothing would appear to criminate him. The worst thing that he saw was the stupid hungered boy on the adjoining farm coming wading through the corn. He had left his dirty lean kine picking up the very roots of the grass, and had come snouking away in hopes of getting another fat bit for his impoverished stomach. But, when he

saw Goodman Niddery come out of the cot with impassioned strides, he turned and ran through the strong corn with his whole might, always jumping up as he proceeded.

The goodman called angrily on his old dog to come after him, but he would not come, for he was working with his nose and fore feet among Jock's perfumed ashes with great industry; so the goodman turned back into the house, and hit him over the back with his long pike-staff, which made him glad to give over, and come out about his business; and away the two went to reconnoitre further.

As soon as the old dog was fairly a-field again, he took up the very track by which Jock had carried the carcase that morning, and went as straight as a line to the hidden treasure in the thicket. The goodman took off the thorns, and removed the leaves, and there found all that remained of his favourite and beautiful pet lamb. Her throat was all cut and mangled, her mouth open, and her tongue hanging out, and about one half of her whole body a-wanting. The goodman shed tears of grief, and wept and growled with rage over the mangled form, and forthwith resolved (which was hardly commendable) to seize Jock, and bring him to that very spot and cut his throat.

Jock might have escaped with perfect safety had he had the sense or foresight to have run off as soon as he saw his master enter the wood; but there seems to be an infatuation that directs the actions of some men. Jock did not fly, but went about and about, turning his kine one while, his nine sheep another, and always between hands winning a pelt at one of the ill-conditioned calves, till his incensed master returned from the fatal discovery, and came up to him. There was one excuse for him, he was not sure if the carcase had been found, for he could not see for the wood whether or not his master went to the very place, and he never thought of the sagacity of the dog.

When Goodman Niddery first left the wood, he was half running, and his knees were plaiting under him with the anticipation of horrid revenge. Jock did not much like his gait; so he kept always the herd of cows, and the sheep too, betwixt himself and this half-running master of his. But the goodman was too cunning for poor Jock; he changed his step into a very slow careless walk, and went into the middle of the herd of cows, pretending to be whistling a tune, although it was in fact no tune, but

merely a concatenation of tremulous notes on C sharp, without the least fall of harmony. He turned about this cow and the other cow, watching Jock all the while with the tail of his eye, and trilling his hateful whistle. Jock still kept a due distance. At length the goodman called to him, ‘Callant, come hither, like a man, and help me to wear this cow against the ditch. I want to get haud o’ her.’

Jock hesitated. He did not like to come within stroke of his master’s long stick, neither did he know on what pretence absolutely to refuse his bidding; so he stood still, and it was impossible to know by his looks whether he was going to comply or run off altogether. His master dreaded the latter, and called to him in a still kinder manner, until Jock at last unfortunately yielded. The two wore the cow, and wore the cow, up against the ditch, until the one was close upon her one side, and the other upon her other. ‘Chproo! hawkie! chproo, my bonnie cow!’ cried the goodman, spreading out his arms, with his pike-staff clenched fast in his right hand; then springing by the cow in a moment, he flew upon Jock, crying out, with the voice of a demon, ‘D—n you, rascal! but I’ll do for you now!’

Jock wheeled about to make his escape, and would have beat his master hollow, had he been fairly started, or timeously apprised of his dreadful danger; but ere he had run four or five steps the pike-staff came over the links of his neck such a blow that it laid him flat on his face in a mire. The goodman then seized him by the cuff of the neck with the one hand, and by the hair of his head with the other, and said, with a triumphant and malicious laugh, ‘Now, get up, and come away wi’ me, my braw lad, and I’ll let you see sic a sight as you never saw. I’ll let you see a wallydy sight! Get up, like a good cannie lad!’

As he said this he pulled Jock by the hair, and kicked him with his foot, until he obliged him to rise, and in that guise he led him away to the wood. He had a hold of his rough weatherbeaten hair with the one hand, and with the other he heaved the cudgel over him; and as they went the following was some of the discourse that passed between them.

‘Come away, now, my fine lad. Are nae ye a braw, honest, good callant? Do nae ye think ye deserve something that’s unco good frae me? Eh? Ay, ye surely deserve something better nor ordinar’: And ye shall hae it too –.’ (Then a kick on the posteriors, or a lounder with the staff –.) ‘Come your

ways like a sonsy, brave callant, and I'll let you see a bonny thing and a braw thing in yon brake o' the wood, ye ken.'

Jock cried so piteously that, if his master had not had a heart of stone, he would have relented, and not continued in his fatal purpose; but he only grew the longer the more furious.

'O let me gang! let me gang! let me gang!' cried Jock. 'Let me gang! let me gang! for it wasna me. I dinna ken naething about it ata'!'

'Ye dinna ken naething about what, my puir man?'

'About yon bit sheep i' the wood, ye ken.'

'You rascal! you rogue! you villain! you have confessed that you kend about it, when I wasna speiring ony sic question at you. You hound! you dog! you savage wolf that you are! Mother of God! but I will do for you! You whelp! you dog! you scoundrel! come along here.' (Another hard blow.) 'Tell me now, my precious lad, an ye war gaun to be killed, as ye ken something about killing, whether would you choose to have your throat cut, or to have your feet tied and be skinned alive?'

'O dinna kill me! dinna kill me!' cried poor Jock. 'My dear master, dinna kill me, for I canna brook it. Oh, oh! an ye kill me I'll tell my mother, that will I; and what will Marion say t'ye, when she has nane but me? Oh master dinna kill me, and I'll never do the like o't again!'

'Nay, I shall take warrant for that: you shall never do the like o't again!'

In this melancholy and heart-breaking manner he dragged him on all the way by the rough towsy head, kicking him one while, and beating him another, till be brought him to the very spot where the mangled remains of the pet lamb were lying. It was a blasting sight for poor Jock, especially as it doubled his master's rage and stern revenge, and these were, in all conscience, high enough wrought before. He twined the hapless culprit round by the hair, and knocked him with his fist, for he had dropped the staff to enable him to force Jock to the place of sacrifice; and he swore by many an awful oath, that if it should cost him his life, he would do to Jock as he had done to that innocent lamb.

With that he threw him on the ground, and got above him with his knees; and Jock having by that time lost all hope of moving his ruthless master by tears or prayers, began a struggling with the force which desperation sometimes gives, and fought with such success that it was with difficulty his master could manage him.

It was very much like a battle between an inveterate terrier and a bull dog; but, in spite of all that Jock could do, the goodman got out his knife. It was not, however, one like Jock's, for it had a folding blade, and was very hard to open, and the effecting of this was no easy task, for he could not get both his hands to it. In this last desperate struggle, Jock got hold of his master's cheek with his left hand, and his nails being very long, he held it so strait that he was like to tear it off. His master capered up with his head, holding it back the full length of Jock's arm; yet still being unable to extricate his cheek from Jock's hold, he raised up his knife in his right hand in order to open it with his teeth, and, in the first place, to cut off Jock's hand, and his head afterwards. He was holding down Jock with his right knee and his left hand; and while in the awkward capering attitude of opening his knife, his face was turned nearly straight up, and his eyes had quite lost sight of his victim. Jock held up his master's cheek, and squeezed it still the more, which considerably impeded his progress in getting the knife open; and, at that important moment, Jock whipped out his own knife, his old dangerous friend, and struck it into the goodman's belly to the haft. The moment he received the wound he sprang up as if he had been going to fly into the air, uttered a loud roar, and fell back above his dead pet lamb.

Lord, how Jock ran! He was all bespattered with blood, some of it his own, and some of it his master's; wanted the bonnet, and had the bloody knife in his hand; and was, without all doubt, a wild frightsome-looking boy. As he sped through the wood, he heard the groans and howls of his master in the agonies of death behind him. Every one of them added to Jock's swiftness, till it actually became beyond the speed of mortal man. If it be true that love lends a pair of wings, fear, mortal fear, lends two pair. There is nought in life I regret so much as that I did not see Jock in this flight; it must have been such an extraordinary one. There was poor Jock flying with the speed of a fox from all the world, and yet still flying into the world. He had no home, no kindred to whom he durst now retreat, no hold of any thing in nature, save of his own life and his good whittle; and he was alike unwilling to part with either of these. The last time he was seen was by two women on Kirtle-common. He appeared sore bespent, but was still running on with all his might.

The goodman was found before the evening, but only lived to tell how he had come by his end. All his friends and servants were raised, and sent in

pursuit of Jock. How he eluded them no man knows; but from that day Marion's Jock has never been more seen or heard of in this land.

CHAPTER 19

Cher. That story of our captain's is rather an odd story. Is it not, Mark?
Mark. Rather of the wonderful.

Ford

'I dinna ken but I could maybe tell ye something about him an I liket,' said Tam Craik, 'but I wad maybe be as wise to haud my tongue.'

'I wad like very weel to hear mair about him,' said Charlie; 'for his life has had such a queer beginning, it maun surely hae had a queer end.'

'But what an it shouldna be endit yet, Yardbire,' said Tam: 'Marion's Jock is perhaps living, and life-like, to tell his ain tale. However, we'll say nae mair about that just now, till you tell us what you think o' Gibbie Jordan's tale. For my part, I never heard a tale I was sae muckle interested in a' my life.'

'It is ane o' the best tales *o' the kind* that ever I heard,' said Charlie.

'It is a most abominable tale,' said the poet.

'In what way, Master Poet?' said Charlie: 'I dinna like to hear ony body condemned without reason.'

'It is for the badness of the moral that I do it dislike,' said the poet: 'The moral is so truly bad, all mankind it must shock; it is to kill this harmless lamb, the flower of all the flock – to feed upon her lovely form that's fairer than the snow – to eat her flesh and drink her blood! It makes mine eyes to flow!'

'Gude faith, an I thought that war his drift, I wad brain him,' said Charlie; 'and I confess it looks rather like it.'

'There can be no doubt of it,' said Master Michael Scott: 'The maid Delany is the favourite lamb, whom he wishes you to kill and feast on in the same delicious manner as did the hero of his tale; and I am the goodman whom you are to stick afterwards, and fairly make your escape.'

‘It is a shocking tale I really doubt,’ said Charlie; ‘and throws a disgrace and an imputation o’ something unseemly on my chief and a’ his friends, and I winna put up wi’ it.’

‘I do propose that from the walls the caitiff we do throw,’ said the poet; ‘or kill and eat for dainty meat the laird of Peatstacknowe.’

‘I fear if the votes were to be ta’en just now he wad hae an ill chance,’ said Charlie: ‘But it’s fair in ha’ where beards wag a’. Let ilk ane o’ us hae a fair chance. There may be mae bad morals amang us. Wha’s turn is’t next?’

Charlie himself, being next in point of seniority, was called on for his tale.

‘I hae been thinking hard what tale I should tell you,’ said Charlie; ‘but I find I can tell nought but the thing I hae seen, and I’ll be pinched sair eneuch to make sense o’ that. Therefore, gin ye like, I’ll tell ye my first adventure in war – for I aye mind it the best, and will do as lang as I live.’

Charlie Scott’s Tale

It was under the command of Hab Elliot that I made my first raide; a gay rough spun cout he was, and nae cannie hand for a southland valley. Well, you see, there was a chap came to my father’s house at Yardbire ae morning, and he says to my father, ‘Wat,’ says he, (that was my father’s name, what he ca’ed me Charlie for I dinna ken, for I never spier’d,) ‘Wat,’ says the chiel, ‘ye maun raise your lads, and tie on your wallets, and meet the warden the morn at the Hawk-Hass, there’s gaun to be a stoure on the east border.’

‘An there be a stoure on the east border I’s be there for ane,’ said my father; ‘but the de’il ae man hae I left but auld Will Nicol and the callant Charlie. There hae seven men o’ Moodlaw and Yardbire fa’en sin Beltan. I canna mak men, but I shall fight wi’ them I have. As for Charlie, he disna want spirit, but he’s unco young and supple, and will mak but a weak stand in a strong blast: Auld Will he kens brawly how to take care o’ himsel; and, atween the twa, I may be ill bestedde. But, gae as it will, I’ll be there.’

I was a massy blade that day when I gaed o’er Craik-Corse riding at my father’s side. I was sae upliftit I could hardly sit on my yaud; and I saw my father was proud o’ his callant, as he ca’ed me – that made me ten times waur. The first men we came at were the lang-shankit Laidlaws o’ Craik;

and then the Grahams o' Drife they came up wi' us; and when we came to Howpasley, my father got the laird's right hand, and we gaed ower Skelfhill-swire seven score and ten, but there were only fifty o' us had horse, and mine was ane o' the best.

'Wha's this stripling that rides the good dun mare?' said the laird o' Howpasley.

'That's my bit niff-naff of a callant,' says my father: 'That's my Charlie, cousin John.'

'He's a twig of a good tree,' said Howpasley: 'I like the spark gayan weel, if he wad ride a little evener up, an' no haud forrit his head like a woodcock. But, my word, he has a lang arm!'

'Ay, a pair o' them, cousin,' said my father; and the twa carles hotched and leuch at my father's joke.

The warden was lying at the Hawk-Hass wi' twal score o' good men; but there were nane o' them had horses but the Elliots, and some gentlemen of the Scotts. When Sir Ringan saw us coming, he came out on foot to meet us; and when the gentlemen of our party saw that, they lighted off their horses, gae them to their henchmen, and walked out before the men. Howpasley walked on the right hand, my father next, and, as he desired me, I came slounging up next him. I lookit best on foot, for my legs were sic a length; I was higher in fact by half a foot than either John of Howpasley or my father, but a perfect tripe for sma'ness. When our captain, the brave Redhough, came near to us, I thought I should hae swarfed; my heart dunt-duntit like a man humblin bear, and I was maist gasping for breath. I had heard sae muckle o' his bravery that I expectit an auld, gruff, austere carle, as proud as Lucifer, to meet us. But, instead o' that, I sees a boardly knight in the very prime o' manly beauty: his cheeks were ruddy, his eyes dark, and the black beard on his booner lip was just beginning to curl upward. My heart was a' his ain at the first look; and I said to mysel, 'Ye're the man that I'll risk my neck wi' ony day.' I likit him sae weel that I mind I thought I could just hae lain down in a gutter, and letten him tramp on the tap o' me.

He first shook Howpasley by the hand, and then my father; and then he gave a broad look to my beardless face, turning his eye back to my father's.

'That's my Charlie, Sir Ringan; my only son now,' said my father.

'You are welcome, cousin Charlie, to our camp,' said he: 'If ye be as brave a man as your father, I shall never want a hero at my side.'

I should hae said something in return, but the deil a word I could say, for I was like to fa' to the fuffing and greeting. He spake to a' the gentlemen in the same kind hamely manner; and then lookit at a' the men, and spiered how mony belonged to every ane.

'And how many are with you, cousin Yardbire?' said he.

'They are a' here that I hae, noble chief,' said my father: 'Last year at this time I brought forty to the field, and now I hae nae ane but my auld henchman and that lad. We hae somehow been ower rash, and I now get a' the wyte. They ca' me Wat the Waster – and not a man will haud land under me.'

'Ay, ay, Yardbire,' said he; 'you and your men hae stood the brunt o' the battle ower often for me and mine. But you are grown auld, and ye maunna claim the post of honour ony mair till Charlie come to his strength. I'll make you captain this day o' the best troop you ever led. You shall hae the hard-headed Olivers, the grimy Potts, and the skrae-shankit Laidlaws; and you shall form my flying party—'

My father here interrupted him with 'Na, na, my master, deil a flying troop I'll lead! if it binna a fighting ane, it winna follow me lang.'

The warden smiled; and calling out all the men of the families he had named, he put such of them as had horses under the command of my father. Of these there were forty-seven, so that our troop consisted of fifty men in all. We were joined with the Elliots; but Habby having ninety men of his own name, the command of the horse devolved on him, and my father was only looked on as the second. I didna like this unco weel; but it coudna be helped, and I was glad to be in the field ony way.

The first sight we got o' the English was frae the top o' Penchrist; but a' that day we could only ken where they were by the reek they were raising. My blood boiled when I saw them burning the houses o' Scotsmen, and fain wad I hae had a hand-shaking wi' them.

There was ae message came after another a' that day. The Kers had been beat and chased across the river, and the English host had over-run their territory. Our chief didna seem to care for that sae muckle as I thought, nor wad he stir his foot till they crossed the Rule. There war mae men came in every hour, for the beacons were a' bleezing; and as soon as the English set foot on the territory of the middle marches, away we rade straight to meet them.

It was on the hill of Hawthornside where I first saw the face o' an enemy; and I'll never forget sic queer strummings as I had within me. Oh, I wad fain hae been at them! There was a kind o' yeuk, a kind o' kittling, a sort o' prinkling in my blood like, that I fand wadna be cured but by the slap o' a sword or the point o' a spear. Instead o' being feared for a wound, I wad hae gi'en my horse and light armour baith to have had a good prodd frae an Englishman – but I wad hae liket that the warden had seen me.

We kept the hills between them and the border wi' our horse, but the foot kept the straits to the westward. Forbye the Elliots, and my father's troop o' Potts, and Olivers, and skrae-shankit Laidlaws, the warden had three hundred Scotts on horseback; so that in all he had short o' five hundred horse, and about eight hundred foot. At the head o' his horse he rade straight up to the faces o' the English, and challenged them in our king's name to tell their business in that place. Up came an English knight, Sir Robert Neville of Ravensworth, and he crackit baith proudly and saucily, but I didna ken weel what he said. He threatened no to leave a beast or a body atween Borthwick and the Border. Our captain was as crouse as the other, sae there was nothing but ill blude atween them; but the thing that we likit warst of a' was the certainty that he had eight thousand men, being just sax for our ane.

The warden then held a council o' friends upon the top of the hill, and in view of the English host. Some said ae thing and some said another to him; but at length he turned to my father, and he says, 'What says our cousin Walter o' Eskdale to a' this? But I needna speer that – he never gae me aught but ae advice a' his life.'

'I'll tell you what I wad do, captain,' says my father: 'Afore yon sun were twa cock-strides down the west I wad fight them.'

'I kend what it wad be,' said the warden. 'But, my brave Yardbire, are you considering the disproportion o' force?'

'What's that to think about?' said he, 'the greater the better!'

The warden claspit him in his arms, and the tears came hopping down my muckle soft flobby cheeks.

'Yes, captain,' continued my father, 'I hae been thinking o' the odds against us, and I am thinking o't just now. But ye ken art may do muckle.'

'Now, to hear him speaking about art!' said the warden, pushing him playfully around by the shoulder – 'To hear a man speaking sagely about

art, that never thought of ony other art in his life but hard hand nevel! Pray now, my dear cousin, will ye let us hear this deep profound art o' yours, that will enable ae man to beat half a dozen?'

'I wad form our little army into the shape o' a wedge,' said my father; 'and I wad yerk that little wedge into the heart of their great log of an army, and split it a' to shivers.'

'G—d a mercy, hear to him!' cried the warden. 'And pray what is to form the point o' this wedge, Yardbire?'

'Just my grey naig's head, captain.'

'I kend weel what it wad come to, cousin. Your grey naig's head wad soon be cracked; but an ought were to happen yours, what wad come o' me?'

I thought sae muckle o' my auld father, that I couldna haud my tongue nae langer, and that was the first word I ever spake to the warden in my life. 'Never fear, my master,' quo' I; 'it winna be ilka ane that sal crack his grey crown the day.'

'Weel said, Charlie!' cried the auld hero; and he waved his cap round his head. 'Weel said, little Charlie! Now, captain, for the wedge!'

The warden lookit a good while at us without speaking, and I gart mysel trow there was a blink o' admiration in his dark eye; 'Ah, Wat, Wat!' said he; 'weel do you ken I'm ower ready to follow your mad schemes! But they have sae often proved successfu', though wi' very hard wark, that I'll e'en take the risk, and sey your skill aince mair.'

He then drew his horse from the height into the glen behind, and formed them precisely on my father's plan, with a troop of horse in front, and one on each wing, the foot being arranged in close column in the middle; and as my father claimed the post of honour as his right, he rode the front man: Will Nicol and I were next him, and behind us there were four of the Laidlaws. I saw no farther, but was informed after that when the horse made the charge, the foot had orders to run and keep up with them.

We took a sweep down the water to the north, and appeared all of a sudden in the rear of the English army. Their scouts had seen us, but could not guess our intent; for as to a thought of our attacking them, that never entered their heads, so that their host was not new-modelled farther than their columns facing about toward us. They deemed we were going to retreat toward the north, and were making ready to pursue us, when all at

once the point of the wedge turned at a right angle, and rushed with all haste on the centre of their line.

Then there was such a hubbub, and calling, and noise of armour rattling throughout their army as I had never heard! My father spurred on, and, after some few hard blows, opened the line. He had the least to do of any, for the ranks opened naturally before him as he heaved his heavy sword. But ever as their wedge grew thicker, their columns being pressed together, lay the heavier on our flanks, and several gallant men of the Scots fell. I saw naething o' this, but soon fand the effects of it; for my father drove faster on than the flankers could bear up after him, and our point lengthened out and grew thinner at every step. I had been unco keen o' fighting, but I got my fill o't then. I trow I gae some o' them some gay good yerks on the chafts.

Ravensworth by this time perceiving the danger in which his army stood of being divided, brought up his side columns and closed around our front. I heard him saying in a loud exasperated voice, 'For shame, countrymen! for shame! will ye suffer a landward Scots laird, an auld crabbit loun like that, to ride in through your ranks and out through your ranks, as they were files o' thistles? Down with the moorland thief! down with him!'

'Aha, Robin o' Ravensworth, is that you?' cried my father: 'An I win within sword's length o' you I shall settle your crack.'

As he said this he raised himself up in his stirrups. Auld Will Nicol roared out, 'For Christ's sake, master, stop!' But, in place of that, he spurred up to the captain with all his might, challenging him to come forward. Neville kept his ground, and prepared for the attack, but refused to come forward; and just as my father and he began to measure swords, my father was struck by six or seven spears all at once on his left side. Some of these he received on his buckler, but others of them pierced his side, and, before any of us could lend him the least assistance, he was unhorsed. Ravensworth also gave him a wound as he was falling. I, who was close behind him, and ahead of all the rest, was now hard bested. I clove the head of the first spearman on my left; and ere I had recovered my sword from the stroke, Ravensworth's sword was at my breast; and I have no doubt that stroke would have slain me, had it not been for a plunge made by my father's horse, that came between us and marred it. By this time the Laidlaws had come up on my right – a wheen as hardy, determined louns as ever brak warld's bread – and they were laying about them like incarnate

devils. The horse kept the lancers from reaching me on the left, so that Ravensworth and I met fairly hand to hand. Sure am I that I never gae sic a straik sinsyne, nor ane wi' sic good will. I dinna think I clave his helmet, but I gae him sic a devil o' a knab on the temple, that he was stoundit, and fell as dead as a stane at my horse's feet. My father was at that time on his knee, and I saw him trying to raise himself up by the stirrup-leather, for he had never yet quitted the bridle of his horse. He saw me bring down Neville, who fell almost at his very side; and he looked to me, and cried, 'Weel done, little Charlie! weel done, my brave man!'

That was the last word I ever heard him say. My brave, worthy, auld father! He was sae used to ca' me little Charlie when I was young, that he coudna gie it ower when I grew bigger than him; and he cried to me, 'Weel done, little Charlie! Weel done, my brave man!' I'll never forget that moment. My honest, kind-hearted father! Ye maun forgie me, sirs, for taking a hearty greet at this part o' my tale. Mony a ane hae I ta'en at the same bit –. Ay – he often ca'ed me little Charlie, and he cried, 'Weel done, my brave man!' That was the hindmost word, and I hae good right to mind it.

The battle thickened, and thickened round us, and we were borne back; for there was sic a rush made by the English to the rescue, that, an their captain had been living, they wad hae tramped him to pieces. I was driven clean stupid, and cared nae ae preen for my life, after I saw the ranks rush over my father; but the skrae-shankit Laidlaws defendit me, and did most excellent work. I never saw ony men that thought less about fleeing or retreating than the Laidlaws. Pell-mell, swap for swap, was a' that they countit on. I heard Davie o' Craik saying to his brother, 'Take care o' that lang swabble Charlie, and keep by his side. Deil hae him, gin he be nae better than he looks like.' The grim Potts were mair cunning than rash; and the hard-headed Olivers could be led but never driven. The Laidlaws were the men for me. Pell-mell, yank for yank. 'Thresh on, Will!' 'Ay, here's w'ye, Davie; deil tak the hindmost!' I hae stood mony a stoure wi' the Laidlaws, and never wished for better lads – lang-shanks and a' thegither.

But I'm forgetting my tale; for aince I get into the mids o' a battle, it's no easy getting me out again. I canna tell you a' the feats that were done that day, especially by the warden. When he saw the great brulzie in front, he came up with the Scotts, and the Johnstons, and the Grahams o' Drife – and

hearing that my father had fallen, and that the English captain was also slain, he took the front himself, and scattered the English commoners like crows.

When we had thus fairly broke through the centre, we turned to the right, and drove that division of the army before us till they took shelter in Jed forest; but seeing the rest, who formed the strongest wing, marshalling up behind us, we drew off to the hills, and encamped that night at the Brae of Rule.

There was heavy mourning for the loss of my father, and we buried him next day at Hassendean. The English were as much exasperated. Dick Neville, the brother of Sir Robert, took the command, and up Teviot they came, laying all waste behind them. We durst not engage them again in close battle, for they were by far too numerous; but we kept hovering around them, and harrassing them whenever we could get a chance. In spite of all we could do, they took the town of Hawick, plundered it, and burnt it to ashes. The warden was neither to haud nor to bind wi' anger then; and, as he durst not leave the country, nor tine sight o' them for an hour himself, he sent off Hab Elliot and me, wi' our hunder and fifty horse, to plunder the castle and lands of Ravensworth, by way of retaliation.

'Now, Charlie,' said he to me at parting, 'Mind what the Nevilles hae done baith to you and me, and neither leave them cow nor ewe, man, woman, nor bairn, blanket nor sheet, dish nor spoon.'

Aweel, aff Habby and I set; he wi' his Elliots, and me wi' my hard-headed Olivers, my grimy Potts, my skrae-shankit Laidlaws, and auld Will Nicol – that was my army, and a gay queer ane it was: I hadna a man o' my ain name but mysel; for the warden kept them a' about him: He wadna part wi' the Scotts at no rate. It was clear moonlight, sae we set off before sun-set and rade a' the night, keeping aye the height between Tyne and Reid; and at daylight we fand oursels at the place where the twa Tynes meet. We were terrified for raising the country, and were obliged to ride out to a little hollow place in a wild moor, and hide oursels a' the day, where our horses got nothing but a rive o' heather, but they had plenty o' water, puir things! Habby kept watch himsel, and let us a' sleep; and there was ae camstary English chap that wad be up to the tap o' the hill reason or nane, Habby chappit aff his head – he wasna very sticking that way.

The next morning after that, we gae the castle o' Ravensworth and the rich domains o' the Nevilles an unco surprise. Habby gaed up by himsel to the gate, and asked a word o' the porter. The man came snooving out half sleeping. Habby had him dead, and the keys in his ain hand, in half a minute. It was a shamefu' morning that; for we killed, and harried, and burnt a' that came afore us; and Lady Ravensworth was burnt, and her bairn was trowed to be burnt. That sat sair on my conscience, for she came to me and beggit her life. I had nae thought o' taking her life; but I was sae intent on the spulzie, that I lost her again, and never saw mair o' her. It was rather cruel o' Habby to lock every door when he set fire to the castle. I saved ae little chap that morning, though I wasna muckle the better. We were flinging blankets, and sheets, and thousands o' things out at a large window, when I hears a bairnie greeting most bitterlie, and aye crying out, 'Daddy, daddy! O daddy, daddy!' 'Poor little English brat,' says I to mysel, 'there's nae daddy near you.' Sae I could nae help rinning into the room to see what kind o' creature it was; and there lay a fine bonnie callant on the bare bedstrae, for they had pu'ed the down bed, and blankets, and sheets, and a' off him; and when he saw me, he held out baith his hands, and cried, 'O daddy, daddy!' I could nae think to leave him to be burnt, sae I rowed him in some blankets and tossed him out at the window; and when I lookit out after him to see if he wasna killed, I heard him crying louder than ever, 'Daddy's boy fa'en! Take ye up, take ye up! O daddy, daddy! take ye up, take ye up!'

When we came to pack up our goods he was still lying sprawling amang the blankets, and insisting on his daddy taking him up as fervently as before. I was wae for the poor thing, and didna ken what to do, for I didna like to be nursing a bairn afore my new warriors. But as luck wad hae had it, up comes Will Laidlaw o' Craik. Will cared nae what ony body thought.

'What, lad?' says he to the boy: 'What's the matter, billy? What are ye lying yammering there for? Eh?'

'Daddy's good boy fa'en,' says the child; 'O take ye up! take ye up!'

'Poor deevil!' says Will, wi' his muckle een wauling till they were like to come out; 'Poor deevil! Indeed and I will take ye up, though I should get nae mair o' the spoil for my share but yoursel.'

Will fauldit a blankit, and rowed the callant carefully up in't like a web. He didna come weel behand at rowing up a bairn; but he did as he could, and had the sense to leave the head out, which was a main concern. Just at

that very moment, when Will was at the thrangest, by comes ane o' the Olivers in a great haste wi' his sword drawn, and it was a' bloody. Now, thinks I to mysel', the puir bairn's gane; for I saw what kind o' chap he was that Oliver. Will unluckily had the boy's head out o' the blanket, and was busy speaking to him without regarding ony thing else; and ere ever he was aware Oliver heaved his bloody sword, and was just coming down wi' a swap on the boy's neck, and he wad hae cuttit it through like a kail castock. Will's e'e caught a glimpse o' the sword as it was coming down, and with a dash of his elbow he drove it aside. 'Eh? What are ye about, min?' said Will, speaking over his shoulder, and keeping his body between Oliver's sword and the child.

'Ooh? What are ye about min?' returned the other, mimicking Will's voice and manner: 'Hae ye nought ado but to work on a dirty English paddock like that? Cut the neck o't.'

'Will I, min?' says Laidlaw: 'I'll see you d—d first, and a' the Olivers atween Jed head and Tyot stane – humph? A bonnie trick to come and meddle wi' me and my bit bairn!'

Oliver went away laughing at Laidlaw, leaving him to manage his nursing concern as he could.

I had witnessed Will's undaunted bravery, and yet I canna say but I was as weel pleased wi' this bit kind turn as ought I had seen him do. I think I see him yet wi' the child in his arms foussomly rowed up in a blanket, like a web – the head o' the boy out, a great neuk o' the blanket hinging down to the ground, and Will glowring back at Oliver's face: 'Eh? What are ye about, min? A bonnie story, to come and meddle wi' me and my bit bairn!' Ha! ha! ha! Honest Laidlaw! I can never forget him and his bairn. 'Cut the neck o't,' says the other. 'Will I, min? I'll see you d—d first,' says Will. Ha! ha! ha! ha! – But then his look! that was the best sport ava; wi' his bendit face and muckle great wulcat een turned o'er his shoulder. 'Cut the neck o't,' says Oliver. They that had seen Laidlaw then! ha! ha! ha! 'Will I, min?' Ha! ha! ha!

'My son, is there not a time for every thing?' said the friar. 'If thou thinkest at all on our condition and thine own, surely thou wilt refrain from such a

torrent of vain jesting. Remember that the words of thy mouth are for death or life; for the possession of maiden beauty, and love, and pleasure; or for the most dismal, and miserable, and wretched of all fates – to be killed and eaten up of thy brethren, the companions of thy journey.'

'Gude faith, the thing's hardly to be thought of, let be spoken about,' said Charlie. 'But I beg your pardon, callants, I maun get on wi' my tale; for if I stick it in the middle, ye ken it is a' ower wi' me.'

'I wish you would get on with it then,' said Tam; 'for if ye maun aye stop to laugh at your ain jests, we'll be a' dead o' hunger or ever the votes be ta'en. Nane but fools laugh at their ain sports.'

'Whisht, whist, Tam,' returned Charlie – 'I hae a gay wide wizen when I am amang friends, but there are some things that I canna swallow for a' that – Where was I at? Aye at the sacking o' Ravensworth.'

We drave the richest prey that morning that I ever yet saw liftit, if we had gotten it a' hame. We had thirty horses laden wi' stuff, and other thirty led anes, besides thirteen score o' good cattle; and we gae the banks o' the Teme and the Blackburn an unco singe afore we left them. I was rather against the burning, but Habby wadna be stayed; 'Na, na; tit for tat, Charlie. That will stand for Hawick and Abbotrule.'

We drave on, and drave on, as fast as the cattle could gang, and some o' the heavy soft anes we were obliged to leave behind sair against our wills. We were terrified for raising the country, for we had sic a far drive: but luckily the Nevilles had ta'en amaist every man with them in their expedition into Scotland; and the first time that we hovered was on Tersit-moor in Northumberland, a little before the break o' day. At that place there was the strangest thing happened to us that ever happened to men – and it was for that that I began my tale.

My heart had been unco sair a' the night wi' thinking about the bonnie Lady Neville o' Ravensworth; and I had often been sae grieved about her death, and her bairn's death, that I hardly kend what I was doing. I thought I saw her kneeling on her knee, and begging of me to spare her life, and the life o' her child; and then how cruel it was in me to rin away rummaging up the stair, and lose the opportunity of preserving her. These thoughts had

made my heart wholly inclined to pity, and, as soon as we lighted, I sought out Will Laidlaw o' Craik, to see if he had still been able, amang a' the confusion, to preserve the life of the child. Will had had a great deal o' trouble wi' him, chiefly from his associates, but he had him still safe an' sound. He had stuffed him in a horse's pack o' blankets and sheets, *wi' his head out*, and had kept beside him a' the gate; and now when I found him he had laid the boy down on the heather to sleep, and had him weel happit up, and Will himsel was lying streekit beside him. He thought that I was gibe him about the business, and tried to waive the subject; but when I told him how much I was pleased wi' what he had done, he grew rather crouser, and could speak about naething else but the boy and his little sayings to him by the way. 'Poor little dear soul!' said Will; 'I think some body had flung him o'er the castle wa' in an armfu' claes, and never kend; and wha kens, but he may be the heir o' Ravensworth himsel. He has been sae miraculously saved that he will surely come to something. But do ye ken, Charlie, my heart is already sae closely knitted to that bit helpless bairn, that I wadna see ony ill come ower him for a' the kye on the Crib-Law.'

'Laidlaw, you shall never rue your kindness o' heart and attentions to that puir misfortunate bairn,' quo' I: 'The moment that I saw you take him up, and row him in a blanket, *wi' his head out*, as ye had been rowing up a wab, I resolved to reward you wi' my hale share o' the spulzie.'

'Never speak about that, Charlie; if we get safe hame wi' every thing we'll no differ about the spulzie.'

'Ha, but Will, your rowing up o' the bairn was a rare scene! ony other body but you, ye ken, wad hae taken the creature up in their arms and rowed a blanket about it: but instead o' that you doubled a pair o' blankets their hale length on the green, laid the bairn across the one end o' them, and rowed it ower the body, and ower the body, and ower the body, till ye came to the far end; and it was but ill rowed up after a' – ha! ha! ha!'

'Hout, Charlie! deil a bit but ye're ower muckle ta'en up about trifles. I wish ye wad think mair about the perilous situation we are in. Watch a wee while, and let me get a sleep.'

Will then laid his arm over the boy and the hott o' claes, and fell sound asleep. Our men were a' placed two and three around the hale muir to guard the cattle, and all were resting on their arms, to be ready to rush together on any alarm. I was sitting and keeping a good look out a' round about, and

Will he was swuffing and sleeping. Every thing was quiet, except now and then that the hum of an ox was to be heard which missed his neighbour, or the eiry whistle o' the moss-plover. It was a while before the day-sky, and I was just beginning to turn drowsy, when I thought I saw something white on the muir, about two hundred strides from me. 'St Mary be my buckler!' said I to mysel: 'What can you be? It is surely a flight o' white mist risen out o' the earth, for I see it moving. If it be a mist fawn, as I dare say it can be naething else, it has drawn itself up into a form the likest that of a woman of ought ever I saw.' As I was mumbling and speaking this to mysel, I perceived that it still drew nearer, and that it wasna ane o' the fairy fawns o' mist whiles to be seen stealing about i' the night-time, but a lady a' clad in white. It glided athort the moor, and athort the moor, as if it had been looking for something it had lost; and at last I saw it spring away from one point to another at a considerable distance, as swift as a flash o' fire, as if something had startled or offended it. I learned after that the point from which it fled was the very spot where Habby Elliot lay, and who at that time was lying in a sound and troubled sleep. When it again stopped, its motions were very extraordinary – for though the morning was dark, there was such a pale and a pure whiteness about it, that I saw it the better. It was like a streamer o' light, or the reflection of a starn in the water, that aye in the darkest nights appears brightest. When it paused at the place I mentioned, it bent its body backward, its arms were crossed on its breast, and I saw like its hair streaming in the air behind it. Then it spread both its hands toward heaven, as in the act of making fervent supplication. From that point it came straight toward me, after giving a shiver that made all my een dazzle.

'Will Laidlaw!' cried I, but in a violent whisper below my breath; 'Will Laidlaw o' Craik! for God's sake waken up, and see what this is.'

I was sitting, but Will sprang to his feet, and seized his sword. 'Where? where? where? Where is it, Charlie? Where is it, callant?' whispered he. I pointed to it, but durst not speak. Will rubbed his een and rubbed his een, and at length perceived it. 'I do believe, lad, that is some hizzy – and a weel dressed ane she is,' said he; still speaking in a whisper, and sitting down close beside me. 'What on God's earth can she be seeking on this waste at sic an untimely hour?' I durst hardly draw my breath, let be to answer him; and sae he continued, 'I think it wad hae been as decent-like an she had lain

still in her bed rather as comed raiking out amang a wheen wild men on sic a wild height. Oho! I'll wager my neck it is some spy in disguise.'

She was by this time within ten paces o'us, and we both sat still in breathless suspense till she came close to us. I thought I had seen the face before, but couldna tell where, till she kneeled on one knee at my feet, crossed her hands, and looked me in the face with the most piteous expression of countenance. Then I saw it was the lady o' Ravensworth, and in the very posture that I had seen her for the first and last time. Yet there was no anger in her face; it seemed merely a look of supplication; and at length she touched her lips three times, as an intimation that she wished to speak and could not. As for me, my mouth was sealed; and that I might see nae mair than I had seen, I threw mysel agroof, wi' my face to the ground, and held by the heather firmly wi' baith my hands.

Honest Will had nae suspicions o' ony thing beyond nature; and at length he says, 'What are you wanting wi' us, Madam, that ye're making a' thae murgeons?'

'You do not know me,' returned she, 'but that young warrior beside you does. He has been guilty of a neglect that he will rue till the day of his death. But, for another deed of mercy that you and he have done, your fates are averted, and your heads shall be covered in the hour of danger, which is fast approaching. You have saved a child from the devouring flames; – if you dare to wrong a hair of that child's head, how dreadful will be your doom! There is a terrible hour approaching; – look at his breast that you may know him again, for I cannot see the fate of the day. But if you would thrive on earth and be admitted into heaven, guard and preserve that dear child – That child is mine—'

'Say nae mair, honest woman,' says Will, perfectly undismayed, 'an the child be yours you're perfectly welcome to him. It was to save his bit innocent life that I brought him away, and no for ony greed o' other folks bairns. I kendna wha was aught him, but sin he be yours I'll deliver him safe into your hands. Take care an' no let him get cauld, for the morning air is no gude for a bairn.'

So saying, Will howked the boy out o' the mids o' a great heap o' claes, rowed him up as weel as he could, and then said, after two or three sobs, 'I like ill to part wi' him, but a mother's aye a mother.' Then he kissed him, and added, 'Fare-ye weel, my wee man! You and I will maybe never meet

again; but, whether or no, you will be nae the waur o' a trooper's blessing. An ye be spared ye'll be a man when auld Will Laidlaw's head is laid i' the grave. Hae, honest woman, there's your son, and God bless you baith!'

She bent her body over him in the most affectionate way, and stretched her arms as if to embrace him, but she neither touched him nor any part of Laidlaw's claes. The boy had awakened, and when Will held him out to give him up to his mother, he cried out, 'No-no-no-no. No go ty'e, no go t'ye. Daddy's boy feared, daddy's boy feared.'

'Gude faith, sae ye may, my man!' thinks I to myself, 'an ye kend about a' this as weel as I do!'

I saw naething that was passing, for I was lying close on my face, and hinging by the heather; but I heard a that was said, and Will tauld me the rest afterwards. He said, she made the sign of the cross above her child's breast, then over his own head, as he stooped forward with him in his arms. Then she glided aside, and made the cross over my head and shoulders, and it was heaven's grace that I didna ken, else I wad hae swarfed away. Last of all, she again bent herself over her child, and stretched out her arms on each side of him; then, leaning herself back on the air, she arose gently from the ground, and sailed away through the dim shades of the morning toward the verge of the heaven.

I wondered what was asteer then, for I heard Will crying on the Virgin Mary to preserve him, and rhaming o' er the names o' a' the saints he had ever heard of; and at length he gae a great gluther, like a man drowning, and fell down wi' sic a dunt he gart a' the moss shake again. The bairn screamed and grat; and I didna ken what to do, for I durstna look up for fear o' seeing the ghost; till at length I heard that the rest of the sentinels had caught the alarm, and were passing the watchword frae ane to another, and then I ventured to set up my head. But, gude and gracious, sic a grip as I did haud by the heather!

I took up the child, covered him with my cloak, and soothed him; and the poor little harassed thing hid his face in my bosom. Will lay quivering and struggling like ane in a dream, or under the influence of the night-mare; and, after I had rolled him three times over, he awoke in the most horrid consternation. 'Charlie, where are ye? Speak to me, Charlie, and tell me where I am.' Then a whole string o' saints and angels were a' invoked, one after another, ower and ower again. 'Mercy on us, Charlie! I hae had sic a

dream as never mortal man had; and a' sae plain and sae particular, I could amaist swear it was real. What do ye think, Charlie? Didna this bairn's mother come to me in my sleep? and she says to me, "That bairn's mine –." Na, that wasna what she said first. "Ye dinna ken me," says she.' And then Will began and told me all that I had heard pass between them before, and all that I had seen, and some part that I had not seen; but a' that I could do, I couldna persuade him that it wasna a dream. And it was better it was sae; for if he had kend and believed that he had conversed with a spirit, it wad hae put him daft. It pat me clean out o' my judgment; and for that day, and mony a day and night after, I kend nae mair what I was doing than ane dreaming, and remembered nae mair what I had been doing than if I had been asleep all the time. I can therefore gie but a puir and a lame account o' what followed, for it is maistly from hearsay, although I was tauld that I bure a principal hand in the fray.

We started at the scraigh o' day, and drove on. There were always four or five light horsemen, well mounted, who rode before our array to see if the coast was clear; and as we went round the head of the Gowan Burn, about mid-day, ane o' these came galloping back, and told us that the English were awaiting us at the fords of Keilder, with an army of a thousand horse.

'Aha!' quo' Habby Elliot! 'I thought we warna to get hame this way. We hae just twa choices, callants, either to fight or flee.'

There was not a man in all our little army that could think of scampering off for bare life, and leaving such a prey behind him; so, with one assent, we rode forward in a body to the brow of the hill that overlooks the fords of Keilder. The English were stationed on a rising ground to the west of the river, and that being passable only by one ford, which was very rough, we could not attack them without the certainty of being cut to pieces; so we kept our station on the steep brae over against them, and sent some few of our oldest and weakliest men to be moving the prey out toward Keilder-head.

We calculated the English to be about five hundred; but neither durst they cross the ford to come to us. They sent a few flights of arrows among our men, which we regarded very little, and determined, if possible, to keep them at bay there till our rich prey had crossed the border fell. But just at the fall of the evening, to our great surprise, the English rushed at once into the ford, with loud and reiterated shouts; and scarcely had we begun to

advance down the steep to meet them, when we were attacked by another body of horsemen behind.

These men were led by a great priest whose name was Bishop Boldone, but who was always called Bloody-Sark; and at the very first encounter Hab Elliot rushed among the English ranks and slew the Bishop with his own hand at the first blow. But it cost Habby dear, for he was cut down in endeavouring to retreat, and fell under a dozen of spears. In short, our small band, being inclosed between two stronger bodies, was literally hewed in pieces, but not before they had slain a great number of our enemies. Will Laidlaw and I fought side by side; and though enclosed in the very middle of our foes, we cut our way through, and escaped without a wound, and with short pursuit.

Our prey was gone. We saw a great part of them scattered on the hills, and heard them lowing, as they returned toward their native pastures. Our drivers, having watched the fate of the day, made their escape when they saw us surrounded, abandoning the spoil. We two fled in silence toward the north-east, and could not even get time to look for the child, in whom we were both so much interested. We had lost our well earned prey; we had lost our friends and companions in arms, and we had lost our honour by suffering ourselves to be surprised by the ambush behind; yet we both felt as if the loss of the child sat heavier on our hearts than all. There was something so mysterious in our connection with him, that it could not fail making a deep impression on our minds. The vision that we had seen, and the promise that had been made to us – that ‘for what we had done our heads should be shielded in the day of battle’ – soon recurred to us, and we both agreed that our escape was miraculous, and perfectly unaccountable to ourselves. There were not two in the battle who exposed themselves more, and Laidlaw averred that he sometimes saw twenty weapons raised against us at once, and that still, as we approached, the bearers of them seemed to lose the power of striking. It was no wonder that we were impressed with deep awe, nor that we both wished it had been in our power to have preserved the boy, over whose life there seemed to be some good guardian spirit permitted or appointed to watch. Our conversation was all about him. There had been a nest made for him in a pack of clothes. Laidlaw had led the horse himself all the way, and the child had chatted to him, till the alarm was given that we were waylaid, and he had then given the horse in charge

to one of the drivers, with particular injunctions to take care of the child; but he could not even remember who that driver was. I came up immediately after, and charged the lad to take care of the child; and, in the hearing of several of my followers, said that I would rather they lost the whole drove than that ought should happen to him. But now we had lost him; we had lost all but our horses and our swords.

We jogged on all the night in melancholy mood, crossed the Border, and then turned westward toward the Cowd-Peel, which we reached about sun-rise. A little after the break of day, as we were coming through a hollow of the height, called the Spretty-Grain, we perceived something before us that appeared to be moving, and of a prodigious bulk, which, after some hesitation we made up to, and found that the phenomenon consisted of eight horses, all well loaden, and every one with its head yerked to the tail of the one before him; and all these were driven by one yeoman on horseback, who rode beside them with a long goad in his hand.

We soon overtook and examined him; and never was I so much astonished in my life as when I found it was my own henchman auld Will Nicol. He was very dour and shy of communication at first.

'Will Nicol! Is it you?' said I. 'How in the name of wonder did you escape?'

'Humph! I think I may as weel speir that question at you: Humph!' says Will.

'I thought you had fallen with the rest in the battle,' said I.

'Humph! but I'm here,' says Will. 'And I think there's mae here nor me: humph! and I rather think I hae brought mair wi' me nor some fock: humph! I'm comed as fu' handit as some fock, I think. Humph!'

'But, Will, were you in the engagement?'

'What need ye speir that? humph! Where was I else but in the engagement?'

'And did you stay till it was over?'

'Humph! I stayed lang aneuch, I think! humph! It is needless to wait ower lang on a seen bad job. Humph!'

But the real truth of the story was, that instead of staying till the battle was ower, Will didna stay till it began, nor near that time. He was an auld-farrant chap Will, and had a great deal o' foresight; and when he saw us

begin to stop, and the English standing peaceably before us, *herding us*, as he ca'ed it, he was sure there were more enemies coming up behind.

'Will, if I were sure that ye deserted our cause, and came off before the engagement began,' said I, 'although I have not a man left that I ken o', but Will o' Craik and yoursel, may I be a coward and a traitor if I wadna cut you down i' the place where you stand.'

Will had nothing to say for himself but 'Humph! humph!' and he scratched his head and grumbled. I was quite indignant at the old fellow, and was getting into a greater rage than ever I hae been in at a friend sinsyne, when all at once I heard a weak tremulous voice say, 'Daddy's boy cold.'

'Aih-hay-hay!' shouted Will Laidlaw, as loud as he could yell: 'Hilloa, hilloa, hilloa!' – and he sprang first on the back of his own horse with his feet, and from that he darted upon one of those that carried the packs. When I rode up he was sitting on the rumple o' the beast, hugging the child, that he had deemed lost, in his bosom, kissing him, and exclaiming – 'Aih, my man! my dear man, are ye safe? are ye safe? God bless auld Will Nicol! God bless auld Will Nicol!'

It was impossible for two down-cast and broken-hearted warriors to be more uplifted at any incident than Will Laidlaw and I were, at discovering that the boy was safe; and even auld Will Nicol began to recover some confidence –. 'I heard you giving a chap some charges about him, that I kend weel caredna if his head were off – od, he was ane o' the hard-headed Olivers. What cares an Oliver for a man's life, or a bairn's either? – Sae I thinks, sin my young master has ta'en a liking for the bairn, I's e'en gang and look after him. It is a good sign of a young warrior to like to save women and bairns. Sae I gangs, and sae I thinks sin I is bringing away this wee chap out o' danger, I may as weel bring something wi' me as naething; sae I brings aught o' the best horses, and the best laden anes that I could wale, and bound for the Border. A fashous job I hae had wi' them a' night.'

It is needless to tell how frankly auld Will was forgiven.

The Cowd-Peel being a rallying point on all Border raides, we stayed there a whole day and a night, in hopes that some part of our men wad come up; but out of all my fifty men there were none appeared but three of the Potts. The hard-headed Olivers had been slain to a man, and all the

Laidlaws save my brave companion. Out of ninety valiant Elliots there were only twelve remaining, and some of these were of the drivers.

There were fifty-seven Scots, and nearly as many English, with Bloody-Sark at their head, buried in one cairn; and, for the sake of the Bishop, the English raised a heap of stones above them as huge as an abbey church, which will be seen on the height above the ford of Keilder for ever.

Laidlaw slept that night in a good bed with the boy in his arms, for we had no lack of the finest blankets and sheets; and that night the white lady appeared to him again, claiming her child, yet still declining to accept of him, and promising Will protection on earth and a reward in heaven if he continued to guard and protect that boy. Whether this was in a dream or not, Laidlaw could not be positive; but he rather inclined to think he was wide awake, for he remembered of speaking to her audibly. Among other things, she asked him if he knew it was the child that had slept by him on the waste the night before the battle. Will said he was sure. She asked him how. He answered, that 'unless the fairies had changed him it could nae be ony other.'

'But the fairies or some one else may change him,' said she. 'You may be separated amid the confusion and uproar now on the Border; and when you meet again, you may not be able to prove the identity of my child. I bade you the other night examine his bosom, but you neglected to do so. If you had, you would there have found the spur of Ravensworth, testifying his lineage and descent to all the world.'

Will came to me in a great ferment the next day, and told me of all this. I had heard the same words the night before the battle, but had quite forgot them among other matters, and wist as little what they meant as Will did.

'I hae lookit a' his bits o' claes, and graepit them a',' said he; 'but I can find nae spur. How could there be a spur about a nakit bairn? It is may be in amang the blankets.'

'It is perhaps some private mark,' said I. 'Let us examine the child's body very narrowly.'

On doing so we found a slight mark on his breast, that seemed to have been made by applying a hot iron at some time previous, and it was exactly in the form of a V with the wrang end uppermost. So we both concluded that this was a private mark of some family, that neither fairies nor men kend o', and that it was perhaps a stamp that keepit them a' away.

‘It is the stamp of the heirs lineal of the house of Neville,’ said the friar; ‘I have impressed it with my own hand, after many masses and Ave Marias said. What became of that child? or whither is he gone? I pray thee to inform us in the words of truth not lengthened out.’

‘Alas, I cannot tell! He was visited by the white lady of Ravensworth every night, and when the gloaming came she would be seen hovering on the skirts of the wood near to him. I grew that I durstna sleep a night within ten miles o’ him, and Will Laidlaw turned clean bumbazed about the thing; sae we were obliged to send him to board wi’ auld Lady Lawder, her that was put out o’ the convent for witchery and the ill arts. She cared nought about spirits, and conversed wi’ the white lady as she had been her door neighbour; and it was said there were strange mysterious sayings past between them. She book-learned the boy, pen-learned the boy, and learned him mony other things foreby that were thought to be nae better than they should hae been. She chauntit sangs til him, and tauld him tales, and, there was little doubt, meant to breed him up to be a terrible enchanter; but afore that could be effeckit, the white lady came and took him away a’ thegither.

‘From that day he was never been seen or heard of in this world, neither as boy nor man. And now, sirs, I find that my story’s worn to a head hair, and that I maun cut it short. So it is done, and that’s an end til’t.’

CHAPTER 20

I have been a skipper in my time,
And something more. Anon, I'll tell it you.

Ogilvie

'It is nae worth the name of a story that,' said Tam Craik; 'for, in the first place, it is a lang story; in the second place, it is a confused story; and, in the third place, it ends ower abruptly, and rather looks like half a dozen o' stories linkit to ane anither's tails.'

The poet was by this time on his feet, and, coming forward to Charlie, he looked him sublimely in the face, stretched out his hand, and spoke as follows: 'There is some being, wheresoe'er he dwells, that watches o' er the fates of mortal men: now do I know it. Yea, and that same being has spirits of all casts at his command, that run, and fly, and trim, and trim, and trim about this world. And it is even true that I have seen of these, yet knew them not. Look here, brave hero, man of heart and hand! and see if thou canst note thy mark once seen? Thy spur; thy A without the crossing stroke; thy V with the wrong end upmost – is it here?'

The poet bowed his breast, and exposed it to Charlie's eye, which, at the first scrutinizing look, discerned the mark he had formerly seen – the mark of the spur of Ravensworth. Charlie's visage altered into lengthened amazement. It could scarcely have been more strongly marked when he was visited by the white lady on Tersit moor, even when he was glad to hide his face in the moss, and hold by the heather with both his hands.

'And are you really the chap that I threw out at the window in the castle of Ravensworth,' said he, 'and boarded wi' auld lady Lawder? The creature that had a ghaist for its guardian, and a witch for its nurse? But what need I spier? My ain een convinces me. Gude faith but we are a queer set that are prickit up on the top o' this tower thegither! I am amaist terrified to enquire where you have been since the white lady took you away; for ye must have

been in the fairy land, or the country o' the gruesome ghaists, or perhaps in a waur place than either.'

'We are a queerer set than you are thinking of,' said Tam; 'for here am I standing, Tam Craik, liege man and true to the brave Scottish Warden, and I carena wha kens it now; but I am neither less nor mair a man than just Marion's Jock o' the Dod-Shiel, that sliced the fat bacon, ate the pet lamb, and killed the auld miser, Goodman Niddery. Here's the same whittle yet, and ready at the service of ony ane that requires it for the same end. Od, we seem to ken mair about ane anither than ony ane o' us kens about ourselves.'

'The day wears on apace,' said the Master; 'and I foresee that there is relief approaching from more quarters than one.' (This made all the party spring to the windows to look –.) 'It is not yet visible to your eyes, but it will come time enough. In the meanwhile, it would be as well to get through with the stories, that we may know and fix on our victim, for, perhaps, we may need a mart this night. And, it being now your turn, liegeman Thomas, or John, by right of seniority, if you know of nothing better, I should like much to hear the adventures of such a promising youth, from the day that you made away with the farmer to this present time.'

'Better, Master Michael Scott?' said Tam. 'Better, does your honour say? Nay, by my sooth I ken o' naething half sae good. I hae been an ill-guided chap a' my life; but, as you will hear, I hae guided others at times but in a middling way.'

Tam Craik's Tale

My friend, the laird, has given you my early history, perhaps better than I could hae done myself, but that is to judge of. He hath added and diminished – but yet he told his story wi' some life, and a' the better that he didna ken wha heard him. In one thing he was wrong informed, for I was not seen on Kirtle-common that night I fled from the slaughter of the old inveterate wretch. I ran in a contrary direction, and slept that night in a moss-hagg, at the head of a water called Lanshaw Burn. Many a hard night I have had, but that was one of the bitterest of them all. I did not rue having killed the goodman, for I rejoiced at having let out his dirty miserable life and saved my own – but then I was sure to be taken up and hanged for a

murderer; and I was chased away from my mother and my country, and durst not face a human being. I saw some goats and some sheep, and would gladly have killed one to have eaten, for I saw hunger staring me in the face; but they would not let me come near them. I likewise saw a shepherd's or forester's house, but kept aloof; and going up into a wild bushy glen, I cried myself asleep, half naked as I was, and slept till about the break of day. When I awakened, starving with hunger and cold, I had no shift but to pull rashes and eat the white ends of them, which I continued to do all that day whenever I came to a rash bush. The next night I came to a solitary house, where I ventured to go in, and there I first gave myself the name of Tam Craik, telling abundance of lies as to my origin. The master of the house was a wealthy vassal, and had great numbers of fat oxen, with cows and calves, besides a few sheep, and he kept me to help him to herd these, promising me a grey coat if I attended to his satisfaction. He was a most extraordinary man, and none of the best – for his words and actions were at variance: Though he conversed with me, or any one, with the utmost familiarity, I never found out that he had told me one word of truth. The first friend that came to visit him after my arrival, he overloaded so with kindness, professions of friendship, and respect, that I believed he loved him as his own soul; and, after he was gone, as my master and I went out to the fields, I observed what a treasure it was to have so good and so valued a friend as he had in that neighbour of his. What was my astonishment to hear from the same tongue that had lauded him to the skies, that he was a cheat, a liar, and a scoundrel; – a greedy sordid wretch that robbed his own hinds, and such wandering pedlars as came by that road, not daring to venture on higher game; one who seduced men's wives and daughters indiscriminately; and was, in short, a perfect demon, and a pest to the whole neighbourhood. 'But, master, why did you caress and commend him so much to his face?' 'O! that is all very well; that goes all for nothing. He is to be sure a vile scoundrel!' 'There are queer people in this world,' thought I: 'There is nothing for it, I see, but, *Tam, mind yoursel*.'

The farmer continued very kind to me in his own deceitful way; but the meat that we got was very bad. It consisted of lean beef, and venison as black as soot, with plenty of milk; but as for bread we had none of any description. So, from the day that I entered to his service, I determined to kill a lamb, or a sheep of any sort, the first time I could get one; but I never

could get the least chance, and might as well have tried to get hold of a deer. I could not help thinking of the delicious feasting that I had in my little shieling, dear as it had like to have cost me; and every day my appetite for fat flesh became more insufferable, till at last, by a grand expedient, I got satisfaction of it. I had thirty fat stots in my herd, and I observed that, in hurrying them through a bog, they sunk, and stuck quite fast: so, having no other resource, I drove a few of them one day, when I was very hungry, into a mire in a wood, and rushing forward on them while they were struggling, I sticked the fattest among them to the heart, so that he floundered and bled to death in the slough. 'Well done again, Marion's Jock!' said I to myself. 'Here is feasting for you now! Here is a feast that will last you a twelve month at odd times, if you can but preserve it.' I declare when I began to cut up that huge animal, I almost trembled at my atrocity; but these kind of feelings soon wear off. I was obliged to eat some collops that day without any cooking, and never relished ought better; I wish we saw such a meal again! My thin yellow beard was a little discoloured to be sure, but that was nothing; I washed it, and went home as boldly among the rest as if nothing wrong had been done.

When I returned to my prey, I found to my great grief that the foxes, dogs, ravens, and every savage beast and hind on these mountains, were determined to share with me; they had actually eaten more in that one night than would have served me a week; – so the next day I employed myself in cutting off all the good, fat, and savoury pieces, and secreted them in well-springs, covering them up with stones; this I did to preserve them from the beasts and from putrefaction; and that day I am sure I had at least ten stones weight of excellent beef – the white and red were so beautifully mixed, it did one's heart good to look at it.

Pleasures are of short date, and the greatest pleasures have the shortest! My master went over the lake next day to look at my herd, and I knew the ox would be missed. Had it not been for my beloved beef I would have made my escape forthwith; but my heart was knit to it, and for my life I could not leave it. I went home at night in great terror, but to my joy I never saw my master half so kind. He told me I had suffered one of my stots to be stolen, but what could the like of me help it: he had a rough guess who had taken him, and would perhaps make him repent it. I was perfectly overjoyed at this construction, and resolved to revel in feasting and gladness; but next

day when I went back to my ox, the hide was neatly taken off him, so also was the head, and both were taken away. This was perfectly unaccountable to me; and I saw the marks of men's feet in the mire, confirming the fact that some body had been there stealing the head and the skin of my ox, which were in my eyes not worth half the labour of taking them off. I knew not what to make of this, but it was evident that my prey had been discovered by some one; and all that I could calculate farther on was, that the hide had been stolen by some body who stood in need of it for shoes, and the head by one who wanted bugle-horns. It was all one to me, as I grew more and more a favourite with my master, who now began to caress me more than his own sons. No young lad in the land could be more thrifty about meat than I was. Being anxious to have the remainder of my bullock out of sight, I stole salt and a small barrel, and salted my stuff in a hole below ground; then, when no very good meat was going by day at my master's house, I often fasted the greater part of it, and then taking a coal by night, I stole away into the wood, and roasted, and boiled, and feasted the whole night. The beef was delicious, and it was amazing what great quantities I sometimes snapped up at once; for even after I thought I could eat no more, there was a part of white marrowy substance about the joints, and the sides of the bones, that I could not give over – no man could give it over. Marry, how delicious it was! I account that fine meat mixed with white, that lies wedged in along the doublings and shelves of the bones, as the most glorious species of man's food; – round the broad shoulder-bone, for instance, the spoolbone – that through which we look for the storms. Think but of the layers of the red and the white that lie bedded around that. Peatstacknowe, let me feel your shoulder. I suppose a man has no spool-bone – ah no! – none! Blessed Virgin! when shall I again shire the long crooked slices of the red meat, mixed with white, from the flats and the hollows of a broad spool-bone!

'He is hungering and yearning to pick my bones, the cannibal dog,' said Gibby. 'But it brings me in mind of a good saying and a true: The swine that is most eager to feed itself is the first slaughtered to feed others.'

‘The horse-leach hath drawn thee aside from thy onward relation, thou froward and voracious one,’ said the friar: ‘Verily, it is better for thee that thou return to thy tale, before thy strength be consumed within thee.’

The loss of this sturdy ox of my master’s gave rise to strange matters; matters which quite confounded my judgment, and which to this day I do not comprehend. My master went away to the sheriff, and the lord of the manor, and made a complaint that his neighbour before-mentioned had stolen one of his cattle, the best that he had on his farm. This was the man that he caressed so much, yet knew to be a scoundrel. The complaint was attended to, and the injury deeply resented. My master returned with a strong body of men, and orders to seize Glendairg, and search all his premises; and if evidence appeared against him, he was to be carried before Lord William, called the Severe, and there imprisoned in the dungeon till time should be given him to clear himself, which, if he failed to do in a certain period, he was to be swung. All my master’s servants, men and women, were ordered to proceed with the party; I went among the rest, and certainly never witnessed so curious a scene. Glendairg came out and met the party with all the consciousness of innocence; and even when he was seized and bound, he still appeared to doubt of the sincerity of the men, especially when they told him it was at the instance of my master.

‘If that is all, it is well,’ said he; ‘I am sure my kind friend and neighbour can mean me no ill by it.’

My master took him aside, and said to him in the kindest and most soothing manner, ‘Do not be the least disheartened, my dear friend: You know how far I would be from injuring you. I would not do it for all the cows in my byre. I ken weel wha has the ox. There is little doubt but he is in our neighbour Bauldy’s beef stand. I have long suspected him, and many is the good beast I have lost. You little know how many good beasts I have lost, and was still so loth to make it public. But I can suffer it no longer. Let the skaith fall upon the skaither. In the mean time I know you are quite innocent, but I instituted this search as a blind to him: You must just submit and never mind it.’

‘O, very well, neighbour, very well,’ said Glendairg; ‘I knew you could not intend me any ill – search all out and in, and welcome.’

They did so; they searched all out and in, and at last, when about to give up, they found the individual ox’s hide that I slew in the bog, lying hid deep below some hay and corn in the corner of a barn. In another place still more unfeasible, they found the ox’s head. They were both laid upon the green, and my master and all his servants, myself included, swore to their identity, as we could not do otherwise. Glendairg looked like one bewildered, and said there was a plot laid against his life, which he neither understood, suspected, nor merited. The shrieve’s officers laughed him to scorn, and proposed to hang him up on the nearest tree; and I believed they would have done it, had it not been for the kindness of my master, who came forward with tears in his eyes, and addressed them somewhat thus:

‘Alas, my masters, this is a heavy and a sorrowful sight for me! This is the bitterest day of my life! I have lost many and many good cattle, and yet I would not – I could not, let myself suspect my intimate friend. Think how I am grieved to see these proofs. Yet perhaps he may be innocent, and this may be some vile plot laid against his life. I beg, therefore, that he may be set at liberty, and the whole business hushed up.’

‘You are a good man and a kind,’ said the men; ‘but this thing must not be. With our lord and master, justice must have sway; but we will report your goodness and generosity to him, and be sure it will not go unrewarded. We can assure you, that this man has not only forfeited his life, but all his farms, as well as his stock of cattle and sheep to yourself.’

For all this my master refused to be comforted, but wept and followed after the men, pleading for the life and the freedom of his friend, but he pleaded in vain; the men bound him on a horse, and carried him away with them to the dungeon of the castle of Coombe. I marvelled greatly at the great kindness and generosity of my master, knowing, as he did, that the man was a scoundrel; but I wondered far more what could induce the man to steal the hide and the head from off my ox.

My master was a married man, and had four children; and though he was apparently a kind husband, his wife seemed quite unhappy and discontented, which I thought highly unreasonable on her part. She knew more, however, than I did; and there are some small matters that women never patiently put up with. He had a number of servant-maids for the

purpose of milking cows, making hay, and cheeses, and such things; and among them there was a very pretty one named Kelly, with whom he had fallen in love; and, after long toying and courting, he had seduced her. I knew nothing about these sorts of concerns; but I thought Kell, as we called her, the most beautiful, sprightly, and innocent being that lived, and I liked to look at her and hear her speak; and whenever she came near me, I was like to fall atrembling. She slept with a little child in a large open loft, above the room where my master and mistress slept; and it so happened that something came by night and frightened her, and she refused to sleep there any longer without some one beside her. I slept by myself in one of the outhouses; and it was immediately proposed by my master that my bed should be removed, and put up in the loft beside Kell's. I was drunken with delight at hearing this intelligence; yet I pretended to be very averse to the plan, hanging my head, and turning about my back, when any one spoke of it, nor would I answer a word to one of them but 'Tutt,' or 'tutts.'

'Tam Nosey, it seems ye're gaun to be bedded wi' bonny Kell the night?'

'Tutt!'

'Ye're gaun up to sleep beside her, and do ye think ye'll never brik lair?'

'Tutt!'

'She's a bonny burd yon, Tam, ye maun tak care.'

'Tutts!'

Well, up I went the next night to sleep in a bed that stood side by side, or rather end by end, with that of Kell. Oh I was so terrified for her, or for having any communication with her, that I would not speak a word even when she spoke to me, but covered myself over the head with the bed-clothes, and lay puffing till I was like to choak for want of breath. I did not sleep well at all. I could not sleep, for she was always yawning, and then saying, 'Heigh-ho!' and then hushing the child to sleep. The next night I ventured to lye with my head out from beneath the clothes, unless when she spoke, which alarmed me exceedingly; and so I did the next night again, behaving myself with great magnanimity. At length I came to that pass, that when she spake to me I did not creep down beneath the bed-clothes, but only made a great bustle and flinging as if I *had been* hiding myself. This practice of deception I continued for several nights, always making more and more pouncing and scraping every time she addressed me. She laughed at me, and seemed highly amused, which made me still the worse. At length

she said one night, ‘Pray do not creep through the house for fright; what makes you so afraid of me? what ill do you think I will do to you? Heigh-ho, Nosey! I wish the bogle may not come to-night. I am afraid it will come, for I thought I heard it. Look that it do not rise at the back of your bed, for that is a very dangerous place. If it come, Nosey, I must either come in beside you, or you must come in beside me –.’ ‘Tutts!’ said I, and that was my first word of courting; the first syllable that I spoke to Kell in that luckless loft. I said, ‘Tutts!’

I suspected no evil intention on the part of my kind and indulgent master, and far less on that of Kell; indeed, how could I suspect either? One day he said to me in the fields, ‘I do not know what to do about you and that wench Kell: for both your sakes I believe I must separate you. She is fallen in love with you, quite over head and ears, and has been complaining to our dame of your unkindness to her. We have a great regard for the girl, and cannot part with her – but, out of respect for you both, you must be separated. I will, however trust you together until next week; and if she do not complain any more, you may remain where you are; but I suppose I will be obliged to part with you then, though against my will.’

This was a terrible stound to my heart, and shewed my master’s masterly policy; for, notwithstanding of all my pretended aversion to the company of women, and to that of pretty Kell in particular, I would not have been parted from her at that time for all the world, not even for all the beef and bacon that was in it. I did not know well how to make up matters with her so as to retain my place, but I thought I would try. So that night I sat down on my own bed-side with my clothes on, and scratched my head, and beat with my bare heel against the loft; but she had lost all hope of gaining me to the measures agreed on between her and her master, and took no heed of me till I was obliged to speak first myself, when the following highly interesting dialogue passed between us:

‘I’m unco feared the bogle come the night, Kell.’

‘So am I!’

‘I wasna sure, but I thought I heard it yestreen!’

‘I aince thought that I heard it a wee too!’

‘How does it play when it is gaun to rise?’

‘It begins a scart, scarting, like a rattan, making holes, I fancy, to come out and take us away.’

‘Aih! then it has just been it that I heard!’

‘Oh! I’se warrant it was, and that I heard too!’

‘Ay; O it’s terrible! we’re ill, ill set here! but I’ll watch a’ night, and keep it aff you, Kelly.’

With that I came and sat down on the side of her bed, to keep the invidious scratching bogle away from her; but I soon became drowsy, and was like to fall down. She begged me to lay down my head on her pillow, but I would not hear of that. Oh! no, no, I durst not lie down there; so I stretched me on the loft at her bed-side, and fell asleep. Awakening before day, the first thing I heard was the bogle scratching. Kell had stretched her arm below the bed, on the side opposite to me, and was scratching slowly and fearfully; then, pretending to awake, she hid herself among the bed-clothes, muttered prayers, and cried, ‘Heigh-ho!’ I groaned; and, stretching my hand round the corner, scratched on the other side even more solemnly, and at more awful intervals than she had affected; so that we lay in great tribulation till the dawning of the day.

Afraid that I had still been too slightly obliging, and that I run the risk of being separated from her, I studied the whole day on the most becoming way of conducting myself, and entered on several most amorous resolutions; but the higher my resolves were, the more pusillanimous was my behaviour when put to the test. I durst not even touch the side of her bed that night; but the wicked unsonsy bogle still continued its scratchings, sometimes on the one side of the bed, and sometimes on the other, I was therefore obliged once more to sit down on her bed side, to guard her from its inroads. In sitting there I dropt asleep, and my head fell down on her pillow – it was impossible I could help that; and then she kindly laid the uppermost coverlet over me for fear of my catching cold; but I was by far too sound asleep to perceive it. She had to pull the covering from below me, in order that she might lay it above me – for all that I did not awake, which was a great pity, but always as she made the greatest stir, I sniffed the louder. A while after, I turned myself about, and gave my head a ketch toward the back of the bed, till my cheek came in contact with something soft; but it was in my sleep – and I was in one so profound, that I could not possibly know what that thing was. What a fright I got next morning on perceiving my situation! I sprung from the bed, and ran away to the hills to my charge, without speaking a word.

I was, however, quite intoxicated with delight, and endeavoured to ingratiate myself with my master, by paying every possible attention to his behests, lest I should lose so delightful a place both for stolen meat and approaching pleasures, which I perceived would still grow more and more sublime, and was glad when he said to me one day that Kell had given over complaining of my rudeness and incivility, and he would trust me as her companion for a little while longer. In the mean while, I was to take care and do nothing improper; but he had such trust to put in me, he was not afraid of that.

He was informed every day by this subservient beauty how matters proceeded; so he let them go on by degrees till they arrived at such a crisis as he desired, which was no more than a boy lying on a girl's bed-side with his clothes on. He then came up with a light one night at midnight to see how his child was resting, pretending that he thought her ill, and found me lying sound asleep, where perhaps I should not have been, though I was as innocent and as free of his mistress as the child that lay in her bosom. He was in great wrath, and pulled me over the bed, giving me two or three gentle thwacks with his open hand: he also rebuked her very sharply, but said to us before going away: 'Keep your own secret. For both your sakes I will conceal what I have seen, although you have acted so *very* improperly; but let me never catch you in the like fault again. If the church get hold of you, you are both undone.'

I was dreadfully ashamed; and thenceforward felt my heart quite reckless and desperate, disregardful of all danger or propriety; and my master made me still worse by telling me that I was to part from Kell in a few days, but that he did not like to put me away just then, for fear of awakening suspicions against us, for he had a great regard for us both! I laid all these things to heart, and could not then have staid from Kell's bed-side a night, if my head had been to answer for it next day. One night we were informed that some strangers had come to the house and were making merry, and before we went to bed our master sent us something to eat and drink. I thought there was something going on that night, for I heard a great deal of muttering and saying of paternosters till a late hour. However, I took up my old birth, and after a while fell sound asleep. About midnight we were awaked by four or five gruff looking fellows, with long beards, and staves in their hands, who ordered us both to get up and dress ourselves. Our

master made a speech to them, lamenting our guilt, and, with tears in his eyes, beseeching their clemency toward us; but at the same time said, that he could not suffer such immoralities under his roof: he had a family of his own coming up, and bad example was pernicious. Then he related what strict injunctions he had given us, yet we had continued to persist in our wicked unlawful courses; that, therefore, he had been obliged to give us up as lawless and irreclaimable delinquents.

All that he could now do was to intreat theirs and the holy fathers' merciful clemency towards the youthful offenders; for that, although we had both mocked and set at defiance the statutes of holy church, he had hopes of our repentance and amendment: And with that he delivered us over to the officers of the church, whom he had trysted and suborned for that purpose. They said he was a good man, but that the offenders must needs suffer a heavy penance, in order that they might be again rendered pure and without blame, in the eyes of their fostering and protecting parent.

When Kell saw that she was betrayed and abandoned, her grief and despair knew no bounds, and she would doubtless have accused her master to his face had she been able to articulate aught distinctly – but she fell into fits, and they hurried her away. We were confined to cells in different religious houses, but both in the same ward. It is well known what tyranny prevails here, and what vengeance is wreaked against all those guilty of breaches of morality, especially if those possessed of riches or power desire it; but it is nothing to that which predominates over the west country, where I then was. They fed me on bread and water, though I asked for fat flesh, and longed for it every hour of the day: and always when the people assembled to worship, I was put in the juggs; that is, I was chained to the kirk wall with an iron collar about my neck, and every boy brought a rotten egg, or some filth, and threw at me, till I was all over bedaubed and plastered like a rough stone wall. The men gave me a kick, and the old maids spit upon me as they passed, but the young women looked on me with pity; and the old wives, before my time of penance was expired, espoused my cause, and defended me from the rabble. I heard them saying to one another, 'Poor fellow, somebody may be the better o'him yet. What wad the mother that bore him say if she saw him standing in that guise? Surely she wad think the punishment far outwent the crime.'

One day, just when I was about to be set at liberty, I saw my kind master speaking to some of the holy brethren, and was glad when I saw him, thinking I saw the face of the only man on earth that cared for me. But he came with a different intent from what I supposed, namely, with the benevolent one of getting me hanged. He said he had missed some money out of his house ever since I came away; and though he should be sorry indeed to find any part of it on me, for his own satisfaction he requested to search my clothes in their presence, to which I submitted without reluctance, being conscious of my innocence. But he that hides knows best where to seek. It was not long before my kind master took out from between several of the button-holes in the breast of my grey coat, two gold moudiwarts, three silver merks, and several placks and bodles. In vain did I protest that I knew nothing about them; the brethren pronounced me the most incorrigible wretch and vagabond that traversed the face of the earth; and, as their jurisdiction extended not to such crimes as this, they sent me off with the proofs of my guilt to Lord William for judgment and execution. I shall never forget the figure I cut that day when brought before Lord William, and accused. I was in a wretched state as to clothes, having stood so long in the juggs. I had been hungered almost to death, and maltreated in every way, and altogether looked extremely ill. He asked them to go over the charges against me, when one of the brethren came forward and spoke to him as follows:

‘My noble Lord and benefactor, a worthy gentleman within our bounds of censure and controul, lodged a complaint with us against two of his servants that had been tempted by the devil to fall into lawless and sinful communication; and notwithstanding of all his admonitions and threatenings of church discipline, they not only continued in their mal-practices, but every day grew worse and more abandoned. He therefore prayed us to take cognizance of the offence, which, for the sake of their souls, and the general benefit of our community, we undertook. Accordingly, my lord, as he suggested, we went disguised as strangers, and at midnight we found this same young gentleman lying snugly in bed beside our friend’s principal maid-servant, the very maiden to whom he had entrusted the care of his children, one of whom lay in the bed with them. Think of the atrocity of this my lord, and look at the man!’

The judge did so, and could not help smiling.

‘What do you say to that master?’ said he, ‘Is it truth?’

‘Yes,’ said I.

This answer made him burst out a laughing. ‘Upon my word,’ said he, ‘you are a most extraordinary youth! Was the girl pretty, say you, monk?’

‘The woman was indeed very beautiful, my lord.’

‘She has been blessed, however, with a singular taste. I think the stripling may almost be excused for this crime.’

The monk then related the circumstances of the stolen money having been found on me, at which the judge shook his head, and said, ‘Alak, it is all over with him. He is unfit to live. What do you say to this, sirrah? Is it true?’

‘Yes,’ said I.

‘True that you stole your master’s money?’ said he.

‘No, I never stole it, but it is true that it was there.’

‘What? you found it I suppose? Tell me the truth, did not you find it?’

‘No, I never found it, nor ever saw it till it was taken out of my coat yesterday. I never had either gold or silver in my hand in my life.’

‘Your woman took it and sewed it in for you, then, I suppose?’

‘I do not know who took it, or how it came there, but there it certainly was.’

‘Did you ever part with your coat to your sweetheart? Did you ever lend her it to mend, or leave it at home with her?’

‘I have often on warm weather left my coat at home for three or four days rinning.’

‘But you declare you did not take the money?’

‘I never saw the money, nor heard of it till yesterday.’

When I said this, he looked stedfastly on me as if he had discovered something he saw not before. There was no man on earth could discover truth like Lord William. ‘Who is this youth’s accuser?’ said he. They told him it was sleeky Tam.

‘I have observed of late,’ said he, ‘that that gentleman never searches that he does not find, and never accuses that he does not bring proof. I have caused several to be executed on the evidences raised by him, and have always remarked that he is the only profiter by their being put down. We must move with more caution. Let that wench be brought before me, and

stop the execution of Jock's Sandy, whom I ordered to be hanged to-morrow.'

My late benevolent master was watching the course of these events with punctuality, and was terribly chagrined when he heard that his neighbour Jock's Sandy was reprieved. He was almost beside himself; but, having great influence with the holy brethren, he persuaded them to retain Kell under their jurisdiction, and not give her up to Lord William. In the course of his scrutiny he had likewise discovered some of his gold pieces on her, and had doomed her to destruction with the rest; yet, at the same time, he told the holy fathers to be lenient, and altogether to overlook that fault, which had originated from the first, and that was one to which youth was liable. He conjured them not to give her up to William the Severe, who would infallibly doom her to an ignominious death. If she had deserved that, he said, it was much better that she should die privately, in which case he would pay seventy merks annually to the church for the securing of her soul. He was frightened for the meeting of so many criminals before Lord William, wicked as we were; and so high was the influence of the convent, of which this was a branch, that the brethren refused to give up the offender to Lord William's officers.

After my first examination was over, I was thrust into a dungeon beside Jock's Sandy, who had been cast to die for stealing the ox which I myself slew; and, when we began to converse freely together, what a tissue of deceit was unraveled! He asked me if I knew any thing about that ox for which he was to lose his life! I said I knew very well about the ox, for I had killed him myself: 'And what a great fool you were,' said I, 'to incur so much danger for the sake of a nout's hide and a pair of horns, for these you certainly did steal.'

The man was perfectly amazed when I told him all the truth, and promised to procure me as much fat flesh as I could eat every day, if I would tell the truth of the story to Lord William. I catched at the offer, for I had suffered so much in my stomach of late, that I would have done far more than he required of me for such an advantage. Indeed I would have done any thing, or said any thing in the world, that I might once more enjoy my beloved mess. He proved as good as his word, for before night the keeper brought me a whole apron full of bits and scraps of the fattest meat that I ever saw – beef, mutton, and pork. There were some square pieces of

perfect, pure white fat, that I sliced down like cheese! They were from the flanks of fat beeves, the briskets of wedders, and the ribs of fatted hogs; and I could not but admire the want of good taste among the gentles who had left these savoury bits to their slaves and prisoners. I was so delighted that I could not sleep by night, but always awakened from my straw and fell a-munching. I wish we saw such a feast again; but, indeed I saw nothing, for our house was in utter darkness; but it was a good meat house, and I could have been content to have lived in it all my life.

In a few days I was once more carried above ground for examination, where I told the whole truth boldly, but was not believed. No one would give credit to the tale, that I had slain one of my master's fattest oxen for the sake of good cheer; such a thing, they said, would never come into a stripling's head, and I had been suborned to my evidence by my fellow prisoner. Lord William asked if there was any proof remaining that I could produce in support of my assertion? I said I had a part of the beef remaining, well salted up in a barrel below ground, and covered with a moss divot; and that I had likewise some hid for fresh meat in some cold well springs, and I would shew them these if they liked. I was sent with a guard, and shewed them the remains of my ox; and when this was reported to Lord William, he called me a rogue and a glutton, and caused them to tie a rope about my neck and lead me through the streets of the town naked, lashing me with a whip all the way. He then bade me make off with myself, for if I was found within twenty miles of that place where I stood, he would cause me to be hewed in pieces.

My late master was taken up, and examined face to face with those he had accused; but how he contrived to elude justice I never knew: ten years after, one informed me that the dame Kelly had accused him before Lord William of having seduced her, and that in the most disgraceful way, and then of forcing me into the situation in which I was caught, for a screen to his own guilt and shame. For all that, it seems poor Kell was returned to the convent, and never more heard of, and sleeky Tam possesses both his own and his neighbour's farm at this day.

I had begun to think that ill deeds throve best; but I now conceived that I had paid very dearly indeed for my late pleasures of feasting and love, being almost flayed alive. I cried bitterly as I fled, and cursed Lord William and his ragamuffins that had scourged me, and vowed to myself, if I lived to

be a man, that I would be revenged on them. I likewise cursed my deceitful master, but I did not curse poor Kell; indeed I found that it was for her I wept most bitterly, thinking myself the cause of all her shame and suffering.

I fled next into a country called Galloway, a place which some of you may have heard of by chance; but I found it the worst meat country, and the worst country altogether, that I had ever seen. I lived there for a number of years, leading a sort of vagabond life, but quite an honourable one. I learned naturally among them to be a great thief, and an acute liar; but I never stole any thing but fat flesh, nor do I account any thing else worthy of running the risk for – from that no danger ever could, or ever shall debar me. I care not much what sort it be, provided it be juicy, and a layer of white next the bone. I wonder whether men's flesh is likest to beef, or mutton, or venison?

'I wish ye wadna always turn your green een on me that gate when you speak about your fat flesh,' said Gibbie. 'I assure you, mine is neither like beef, nor mutton, nor venison; and, what is more, you shall never taste it. I appeal to you all, masters and friends, if this man has not fairly fallen through his tale.'

'I suppose it must be very like veal, then,' continued Tam; 'and if so, I have seen a joint of cold veal very excellent meat, more especially that adjoining the white gristly part; with a little salt, a man can eat a great deal of that without being any thing the worse.'

'My masters, I do protest against these carnivorous looks of the story-teller,' rejoined Gibbie; 'they make ane feel so queerly. It is as if he were tearing my flesh quick from the banes with his teeth. And I call you to note that he has sticked a story, which, from the beginning, is no story.'

'Stay till it be done, an you please,' said Tam; 'the best of my tale is yet to come; and any man may be allowed a breathing space and a little refreshment.'

At Castle-Fern I fell in with an old man called the Gorb, an itinerant fencer, who travelled the country teaching the art of the sword. To him I attached

myself, somewhat against his will; for I saw that, though he was not everywhere a welcome guest, he was nevertheless a privileged one, and always admitted. He was six feet high, with a beard that hung to his middle, and his frame was entirely composed of bones and sinews. The feats that he described to me of warrior prowess first raised in me a desire to learn his noble art; and as soon as I began to manifest a partiality for his profession, he began to attach himself to me, but in a manner so ungracious, that if I had not been a being quite desperate, I never could have borne it. We moved on from place to place; the young men of the country assembled in parties, as we passed, to attend his lessons; and at night we had free-quarters wherever we went; that is, the Gorb was a free man – but many pointed inuendos were thrown out against my introduction as an additional burden. These people had better have let the matter pass over, for he did not fail to pay them back with interest in bitter and sarcastic retorts. On some of these occasions he gave me a terrible character of the country and its inhabitants.

'You are come, poor man, to sojourn in the worst country under the cope of heaven,' said he, 'into a place where there is no faith, no honour, no money, and very little meat.'

'What do they live on in general?' said I.

'On some wretched roots, pulse, and black corn,' said he; 'some lean unhealthy fish, and still more lean and sapless cattle.'

'I like the country a great deal the worse,' said I. 'Is the flesh here so very lean?'

'Why ask?' said he; 'have you not witnessed it?'

'No, I am very sorry I have not,' said I. 'I supposed it had been lent in this country. As for their faith or honour I care not a pin. Their money is of little avail to me; but I hate to stay in a country where there is no meat: and how they can transact business without money is beyond my comprehension.'

'They have none, however,' said he, 'nor was there ever any in this country. They transact all their business on a thing called credit, which commonly attaches itself to a man for a number of years, sometimes for a long, and sometimes a very short term. This enables him to cheat his neighbours for a time, and all his exertions tend only to this, namely, how many he can take in, and to what amount; and when he has gone as far as

this ideal quality of his can carry him, he takes to the bent, and leaves them all in the lurch. This is the exact state of this blessed country called Galloway, and will be its state as long as it continues to exist. The only rational hope concerning it is, that, as it is a sort of butt-end of the creation, it will perhaps sink in the ocean, and mankind will be rid of it.'

He then took a hearty fiendish laugh at the conceit of the country being sunk, and went on –.

'After all, I cannot help being amazed at the rascally crew. Do you not see how suspicion and distrust are stamped on every countenance? Every man makes a bargain with apparent reluctance, and with a dread that his neighbour is going to cheat him; and he is never mistaken. Such is the country, and such are the people to whom you have now come, and such must they ever continue to remain. It is in their nature to be so, and they cannot be otherwise. Here am I, their master and benefactor, who have spent my life in teaching them the noblest of all sciences, without which they could not have defended their country. I have taught every chief in the country, and every one of their vassals, and how am I requited? Ill-clothed, worse fed, and not a bodle in my purse. All my recompense is the freedom of living a life of fatigue and wretchedness.'

'I will not stay another night in the country of such a parcel of rogues,' said I.

'You are wrong,' answered he: 'It is the best country you can be in. You have nothing to lose, and you may gain much. Experience is a man's greatest riches; and of that you will gain abundance. You will here learn hourly how to oppose cunning to cunning; and I will teach you the noble art of opposing masterly skill to brutal force, until you may haply be established as my assistant and successor.'

'I would rather dispense with the honour,' said I: 'You are too lean for me to think of being your successor. Were you a fat full-fed man, I would not say what I might do to attain the distinction; but I have made up my mind to one thing, which is, always to have my meat, honestly if I can, but at all events to have it.'

'You are so far right in your principle,' said he: 'For when we consider of it, a man can have very little more than his meat in this world, for all the struggling and strife there is in it. But since you set so high a value on good living, I can, if I please, assist you to it; for, poor and wretched as I appear,

and as I am, I have a right to call for and command the best in every house. I could likewise take their clothes, for money they have none; but it would be like tearing the hearts out of the dogs – so I content myself with the meanest fare, rather than humble myself to ask ought of them.'

'You are an extraordinary man,' said I: 'But when I look at you, I cannot conceive this privilege of yours to exist in aught but in theory.'

'You shall see,' said he. 'What sort of meat would you prefer?'

'Fat flesh at all times and all seasons,' said I: 'There is nothing like that. Whether it be the flesh of bullock, hog, or wedder, the fattest is always the best.'

'What a kite! What a raven! What a dog!' exclaimed he: 'Well, you shall have it, if it were but to kill you of a surfeit.'

We were lying in a barn when this discourse occurred, and I could not but wonder what the old fellow would do. It was customary for us to take our breakfast at the place where we lodged, and if I might judge from our supper, the place where we then were gave no prospect of very rich fare.

The breakfast was produced; a quantity of black brochen and lentiles. The master of defence wist not how to break the ice by introducing a refusal of the proffered meal! but he considered himself as pledged to me, and his haughty spirit would not succumb. His looks were particularly embarrassed and amusing, and I saw that he would gladly have been free of his engagement, as he began a long palaver of general remarks. I kept up my good hopes, and gave him always an expecting look now and then, to make him hold to his resolution. The people of the house paid little attention to his harangue, till at length he concluded with these words:

'Such being the case, and such the state of the country, I am obliged now to claim all my rights, privileges, and dues from every vassal of my lord of Galloway, as well as from every subject of our liege lord the king, whose commission I bear. Goodman Latchie, I accept no more of black croudy and lentiles for breakfast: I claim, order, and command the best that is in this house. In place of that hog's meat, let us have a rasher on the coals, if you so please.'

'The muckle fiend be atween your teeth, then, to choak you wi' the first bite!' said the goodwife.

'Farmer Latchie, I contend not with women,' said the man of the sword: 'Are you aware of my rights, or do you know and dispute them?'

‘I consider yours as merely a nominal right,’ said he, ‘which no man is bound to fulfil, because no man does it. All my lord’s vassals treat you with common fare. Why should I do more?’

With that a raw-boned young man stepped forward, with a black beard and a ruffian look. He was the farmer’s eldest son, and his name was John.

‘What is all this din about,’ said he: ‘Let me speak, will ye, Master Gorb? Either take that which is set before you, or go away without it. I say that.’

‘You say that? Do you, sir?’ said my master.

‘Yes; sure I do,’ said he: ‘I says that, and I’ll say it again too, to be sure I will.’

‘Then there is my gage, sir. Do you know to what you have subjected yourself?’ said my master, pulling out his sword, and laying it on the board: ‘You have given the king’s ordained swordsman the denial; you must fight him, or find one on the instant to do it for you. If he kills you, he is entitled to take off your head and send it to the king; and if you kill him, you lose your head, and all the goods and chattels of your house are to be confiscate. Rescue or no rescue? Draw, craven! or yield me up the keys of your pantry, your chest, and your sunken cellar, you dog.’

‘I does nae see the sense o’ that, Master Gorb,’ said John, with a countenance right sorely altered: ‘that a man maunna say his awn’s his awn, or what’s his father’s is his father’s, but that he maun tak up sword and swordsman. I does nae fear thee. It’s no to say that I fears thee; but I winna be bullied intil aught; and I just tells thee, that I’ll neither fight thee nor suffer thee to get a scrap o’aught better than is set afore thee; and gang and seek thy mends. Now I says that.’

‘Thou art a craven and a nincompoop,’ said my master, with the highest indignation; ‘and I lift my pledge, and will report thee to thy betters.’

‘Do if thou mayest,’ cried old Latchie, running to an armour chest, and taking from thence a sword and buckler. ‘Disgrace of my house! To give the challenge, and then to flinch. Have with thee, Bellwether! I will give you to know, that old masons are the best barrowmen.’

‘I ground my pledge again, and I take thee,’ said my master. But now the old woman came running between them, crying out, ‘Deil be i’your teeth! deil be i’ your teeth! Tak a’ that’s i’ the house an’ haud you wi’t: there are the keys; there are the keys! deil be i’ your teeth, take a’ – and let us alane o’ your din.’ The Gorb waved the keys aside with his arm in high

indignation; but the wife clung to her point. ‘I take you a’ witnesses,’ cried she, ‘I take you a’ witnesses, I have offered him the keys, and he has refused them. Here, young Gorb; young hing-by-the-gut, take ye them, take ye them. Deil be i’ your teeth, take a’ that’s i’ the house.’

I took the keys lest they should be forgot in the hurry; the two old fellows took to the field with sword and buckler, while both the old dame and her son John strove to interfere; but the old yeoman silenced them both with a word, and I thought he would have struck his son down with the sword, so much was he enraged at his behaviour.

I had seen much sword play by this time in the way of amusement, or lesson-taking; but I had never seen two men meet in deadly foil, and I trembled for the event; for I judged, that if the old Gorb was killed, it would fare hardly with me, being conscious that I was the moving cause of the combat. My master’s demeanour was altogether inimitable. He went through every thing as if it had been a matter of mere ceremony, first slipping gracefully to one side, crossing his hands on his breast, bowing profoundly, and then shaking hands with Latchie: then swimming gracefully to the other side, and repeating the same manoeuvre. Last of all, he wheeled about, cut some wild flourishes with his sword, and took his distance. The yeoman bit his lip, and appeared to be viewing all these things with disdain; but he set himself firm on his legs with his left foot foremost, and setting up his broad bonnet before, waited the onset. The Gorb on the contrary advanced with his right foot foremost; and, instead of availing himself of the buckler as the former did, he came forward bearing it up behind him as high as his head. He seemed to wear it merely because the other did, but he was too proud to make any use of it. Nothing ever did, or ever will exceed the singularity of that combat: the figures of the men, and their manner of fighting, being so different. Latchie was short and squat, the Gorb somewhat like the skeleton of a giant. The art of fighting which the former pursued was to shield himself behind his broad buckler, peep over it, and now and then make dreadful blows around it with the full swing of his body, as if he meant to cut my master through the middle, or shear off both his thighs. On such occasions the Gorb, beside parrying the stroke, made such tremendous springs off at a side, that he rather appeared like a spirit than any thing of bones, sinews, and blood, for as to flesh there was none on him; and at every one of these leaps he uttered a loud ‘Hoh!’ as if he had

been mortally wounded, or in great danger of having been so; yet all the while his face was so sublimely grave and serious as if every movement were to have been his last. He never attempted to hit the yeoman, and had apparently no other aim in fighting, than merely to show his dexterity in fencing, retreating, and advancing. I deemed that all was over with him, and began to be mortally afraid of myself; and any man would have acknowledged what good reason I had, if he had witnessed with what looks the wife and son regarded me. Every one of them thought the Gorb had the worst of it, and that the farmer was sure of the day. Indeed by this time there was little doubt of it. The old wife thrice clapped her hands, and screamed out, 'Weel proven, goodman! that gars him scamper! Weel proven, Daniel Maclatchie! Lie to the breastleather.' At these words I began to look over my shoulder, and meditate a most strenuous flight. But now the most novel scene of all occurred: my master still continued to change his ground, and to skip and fly about, until at length the yeoman, encouraged by his wife's words, came hard upon him, and, heaving up his shield a little, he came with a deadly stroke round below it, ettling to cut off both my master's legs. 'Hoh!' cried the Gorb, as loud as he could vociferate; and as the little squat yeoman stooped to the stroke, he made such a spring into the air that he leaped fairly over his head; and as he passed like a meteor over above him, he gave him such a slap with the broad side of his sword on the hind cants of the head, that it made the farmer run forward and fall with his nose on the ground. He was again on his feet, however, in an instant, and faced about, while his eyes streamed with water from the sharpness of the stroke. This feat astonished the Latchies; but the wife cried out, 'A barley! a barley! foul play! – he's fighting on springs.'

'Emblem true of thy accursed country!' cried the Gorb, and kicking off his sandals at her head, he took his ground on his bare soles. The combatants set to it again; but the yeoman was now on his guard, and fought shy, standing on the defensive. My master soon grew tired of this way of fighting; and, after two or three flying feints at an attack, in a moment he wrenched Latchie's sword from his grasp, and threw it into the air like a sling-stone. The lookers on gazed in amazement – and the astonished yeoman traced the course of his erratic weapon, which, after forming an arch like a rainbow, lighted at the distance of forty yards. John, the farmer's son, was the first who ventured a remark on the phenomenon,

which he did with his accustomed shrewdness, and in the Cumberland brogue, which he had learned by living some years in that district.

‘Feyther, I thinks thou hast thrown away thee swoard.’

‘Ay,’ said his father, biting his lip, and looking after it.

By this time the Gorb had his sword at Latchie’s throat, crying, ‘Rescue, or no rescue, I say? Yield, traitor, or die.’

Latchie paid no regard to him. He only bit his lip, looked after his sword, and stood his ground firm without moving, showing a most unyielding and dauntless spirit.

The Gorb repeated his threat, but the yeoman paid no further attention to it than before.

‘What an unlucky accident!’ said he. ‘Had I not thrown away my sword, I would have humbled you.’

‘Do you regret the loss of your sword so much?’ said the Gorb. ‘Will you promise, on the honour of a good yeoman, not to throw it away in like manner again?’

‘Promise?’ said the other: ‘I will swear on it, and by it, never to part with it in like manner again.’

‘Young man,’ said my master to me, ‘run and bring me this brave yeoman’s sword.’

I brought it, and he took it by the point, and delivered it back to the owner with all manner of courtesy. Latchie took it in his hand, and let the point of it slant towards the ground in token of submission.

‘Nay, nay, I deliver it,’ cried my master. ‘I would not see such a man show fear or pusillanimity for any thing. Exchange me three times three, and no more; and God stand by the right. I counsel thee, moreover, to assume thy best defence, as I propose to do thee all manner of injury.’

‘So be it. I defy you still,’ said Latchie, and took his ground a second time. His wife and son spoke a great deal by way of interference, but were totally disregarded. The combat began again with more fury than ever; but at the second or third time of crossing their weapons, Daniel Maclatchie’s sword betook itself again into the firmament, and after tracing nearly the same course as formerly, alighted on the same spot.

‘You are the devil and none else,’ said Latchie, ‘and I yield to my conqueror. I am at your disposal.’

‘And I will use my advantage, as in duty and in honour bound,’ said the Gorb: ‘Rise up my friend and brother; you are a man of true genuine spirit. I honour you, and I estimate your country more this morning, for your sake, than I have hitherto done. I claim your friendship as a brother in arms. You shall not have cause to repent this spirited encounter.’

The farmer was greatly flattered by this speech. I gave up the keys; and there was no end of kindness and endearment between the two old fellows. We had our rasher on the coals; and I think I have scarcely risen from a better diet than I did that day. I got the greater part to myself, for the rest were all so busy talking and drinking cold ale, that they hardly thought of the bacon. It was nicely toasted, and the fat stood on it like small drops of honey. But I must not dwell on the recollection else I shall faint.

At our meal the yeoman offered my master a new war cloak, with belts, bands, and haversack, if he would tell him by what means he disarmed him with such ease, and in so extraordinary a manner; but the other absolutely refused.

‘It is allowable in chivalry,’ said he, ‘to learn and practice any mode of manual defence, and to keep that mode a secret till you prove it on your opponent. That is my secret, and by that mode I would forfeit my life, nay my character itself, to disarm any man that ever pointed a two-edged sword at my breast.’

‘I should have liked very much to have known that secret of his,’ said Charlie Scott.

‘I found it out privately with the most perfect certainty,’ continued Tam; ‘but durst never let him know that I understood aught of the matter. It was owing to his sword’s handle, which was made for the purpose. It had an inner shell of steel polished like glass; then an outer one of basket-work, formed with rounded bars in such a manner that, by turning his hand in a slight degree to humour the position of the opponent’s sword, and dashing his hilt against the point of it, that entered between those of the cross-bars, and, running up the polished steel within, bent and fixed itself; then by a sudden wrench against his opponent’s thumb, of which he was a perfect master, he not only disarmed him to a certainty, but generally left his arm

powerless. After I had discovered it, I went by myself to try the experiment, fixed my own sword, and taking my master's in my hand, I pushed the basket of that slightly against the point of the other, and behold it fixed in it so close, that with all my might, and all my art, I could not extricate it without breaking it in two, and, in that case, I saw I would leave the point sticking where it was, which I durst not do for my life. At length it came into my head to do as my master did. This had the effect at once; the vibration in the blade caused by the swing and jerk, made it loosen, and it flew away through the air like a fiery dragon.'

'Master Michael Scott,' said Gibbie, 'and my friends, I again appeal to you all if this man has not fallen through his tale. It is turning out no tale at all, but merely an offputting of time, till we shall all perish of hunger.'

'The story of the hapless maiden Kell, and of our hero's first essays in love, I did admire and prize,' said the poet.

'Od help your crazed head,' said Charlie: 'I wadna gie that duel atween the twa auld chaps for a creelfu' o' love stories.'

'Lo, the tale is good,' said the friar; 'but it goeth here and there, without bound or limit; and wherefore should not a man relate all that befalleth unto him. I suppose it behoveth our friend to go on, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left.'

'My tale is indeed long, but to me it is momentous. I should stop here pleasantly; but life is sweet – and, to give me a fair chance for mine, I beg to be permitted to relate one adventure more.' This, after some demur, was granted, and Tam went on:

After spending several years among the hills of Galloway, and being approved of by the Gorb (as he was called by every body, though his name was Macdougald) for a good swordsman, I tired of the country, being persuaded that the ground did not fatten the cattle properly; and from the moment I began to suspect that, I had no more satisfaction in the place, but utterly despised it. I perceived that their beef was never above an inch thick in the ribs, and what was worse, it was not properly mixed with white layers of fat; even the doubles in the broad bone of the shoulder were nothing but

pure red lire. This will never do, thought I. How I despise the people that can put up with such a country as this!

‘Master,’ says I, one day, ‘I am quite tired of this country, and am going to leave it.’

‘Wherefore are you going to leave it, Thomas? Have not I been better and kinder to you than to myself?’

‘For all that, master, I am resolved not to sojourn another week in it.’

‘I warned you that they were a deceitful people before,’ said he; ‘but we must take them as they are. We cannot make mankind as we would wish to have them.’

‘It is not for the men, nor for the women either, that I dislike the country so much,’ said I.

‘What is it then for?’ said he.

‘It is,’ said I, ‘because I suspect that their grass is not of a good quality.’

I will never forget the look that the Gorb turned on me. He was walking somewhat before me, but when he heard my reason for disliking Galloway he wheeled about, and, taking one of his most striking upright positions, with his lean shoulders set up like two pins, he stared at me with his mouth wide open; and then put the following questions to me at long intervals.

‘Grass! eh! How do you mean?’

‘Look at it,’ said I; ‘What substance is in that wiry stuff, and on these hills of black heather!’

The Gorb’s jaws fell down with dismay. He visibly thought that I was deranged, but he answered me mildly to humour my malady.

‘True, the grass is not good; it never was, and never will be so. But I have not observed that you ever eat much of it; nor can I see how a man’s happiness any way depends upon the quality of the grass of a country.’

‘If that be all the sense that you have,’ thought I, ‘I will disdain for my part to exchange another word with you on the subject. Since you think that a man’s happiness can depend on *any thing else* but good grass, you shall be followed no longer by me.’

‘Well,’ continued he, after waiting a while for an answer, ‘I see you are sulky about this whim, but I will humour it. I have nearly finished my terms among the mountains, and we shall descend upon the shores, where there is as good grass as any in Scotland, and I promise you full liberty to go into every field that you chuse, and take your bellyful of it. I have likewise

many things to teach you, which will amuse you in the highest degree, and which belong to the sublime art of legerdemain.'

'What is that?' said I.

'It is the art,' said he 'that enables us to see things and people as they really are. There is scarcely any thing on this earth really what it appears to be; and this art I have yet to teach you.'

From that day forward he began and performed feats that entirely bewildered my senses, but which furnished, wherever we were, a great fund of amusement; all the young people believed him to be in compact with the devil. I have forgot them all but one, which I will remember as long as I live.

We came to a wealthy yeoman's house on the river Urr, where we were to remain several days; and while he exercised the farmer's sons in fencing, I kept the young peasants in exercise – and then in the hall in the evenings he went on with his cantrips. There was a delicious shoulder of bacon hanging up on the farmer's brace, among many meaner hams and pieces of wretched dried flesh. I believe I had fixed my eyes on it, and perhaps my heart a little too. Whether the Gorb noticed this and dreaded the consequences or not, I cannot tell, but he began a speech about things not being what they appeared to be, and offered to give us a striking instance.

'Take down the choicest and best ham among all these above the fire,' said he. I did so, taking down the shoulder of bacon with great alacrity.

'Take down the worst,' said he. I did so; it was one of venison dried like a crooked stick.

'Which do you account the best?' said he. I told him. 'Well, you are mistaken,' said he; 'and I'll convince you of it. Roll them both neatly up in straw, or as you will.'

I did so.

'Now, do you know the one from the other?'

'Yes.'

'Very well: heave them up again that you may not be mistaken in the weight. Now, cross your hands, and heave them with different hands. Quite sensible they are the same?'

'Quite sensible.'

'Very well. Take them aside by yourself and look at them. You will now see them as they really are, not as they appeared to your eyes.'

I hastened and opened out the shoulder of bacon. It was nothing but three dried bones, hanging together by tendons, and stuffed up into the shape of an overgrown shoulder of bacon with brawn, which was covered round with a piece of sow's hide. I shed some tears at this blighting discovery; for though the bacon was not mine, I felt in my heart that I did not know how matters were to come about. I hung the two hams up as they were, and was cured of my itching eye; but no man can tell how things will come round to the advantage of an acute and clever fellow.

While we were at that house, the country was raised to follow the Lord of Galloway into Cumberland. It was a great rising, the utmost quota being demanded of every yeoman in the country, in terms of his villanage. Our landlord got a charge to find five, whereas he had none to send save three, unless he and his eldest son both went, which would have been grievously against him at that time; so he applied to my master and me to go on his behoof, offering large conditions, which were soon accepted. The principal, if not the sole thing that induced me to go out on that raide, was the stipulation that I was to have my choice of all the meat in the house, to the amount of what I could conveniently carry on my back in a march. After a great deal of choosing, I fixed on a small beef-ham, because it was solid, and no bones in it, and blest my master's ingenuity that had let me into the secret of the deceitful shoulder of bacon. The next that came after me was a blade of endless frolic and humour, named Harestanes. He instantly snapped at the bacon-ham, and popped it into his goatskin wallet, nodding his head, and twisting his mouth at me, as much as if he had said, 'What a taste you have! I am glad you had not the sense to take this.' I could easily have prevented him, by revealing the secret; but he had always been trying to make a fool of me, therefore I could scarcely contain my mirth at his mistake; and resolved to enjoy his disappointment in full. He was a sprightly handsome youth, and had such a forward and impertinent manner that he contrived to make friends in every family that we passed by, particularly with the women, so that he lacked nothing that he desired; and tho' I watched him night and day for fear of losing the sport, he never took out his bacon to break it up till the fourth day after our departure. My beef-ham was by that time more than half done. It was a most wretched piece of meat, being as hard as wood, and bitter as gall; but I was still comforted with this, that it was so much better than my comrade's.

It was about eight o'clock on a morning, on the English side of the Border, that Harestanes first loosed out his wallet to make a breakfast of his bacon; and he being very hungry, I sat down beside him to enjoy the sport, taking out my black beef likewise. All that I could do I could not retain my gravity while he was loosening the cords, and taking the straw from his ham, which made him look wistfully at me, and ask what the fool meant? But when I saw him look seriously and greedily at it, and then take out his knife to cut off a great slice, I lost all power, and fell on the ground in a convulsion of laughter, while my voice went away to a perfect wheezle. He could not comprehend me in the least degree, and actually began to cut! yes, he actually began to cut through the bristly skin, while I lay spurring the ground, and screaming with anticipation of the grand joke that was to ensue. Before I could recover my sight from amid the tears of extravagant mirth, the scene was changed; and I shall never forget the position in which the puppy sat, when my eyes cleared. No, it is impossible I ever can forget it! Conceive a wicked impertinent frolicksome whelp of a tailor, for he was nothing better, who had been with Sir Robert Graham's maids all the night, and was so hungry that you might almost have cast a knot on him, sit down to take a hearty luncheon of his bacon ham; and then conceive his looks when he found he had nothing but rubbish and dry bones. If you conceive these, you will conceive the very scene that I saw, at least that I conceived and saw in my mind's eye. How could I but laugh? No! It was impossible I could abstain from laughter; – but yet, for all that, things turned out quite the reverse. He had actually sliced off a rasher of bacon, the fattest, the whitest, and the most beautiful rasher of bacon ever I had seen in my life! There were three distinct layers of lire and fat, curving alternately through it like quarter moons. No man ever beheld such a sight! He sliced out another piece, which was still more perfectly beautiful than the preceeding one. My eyes darkened. I had seen enough to shew me the enormity of my folly, and my irreparable loss! He roasted his rashers on the fire. The fat fried out of them, and flamed among the embers; and when he laid them on his bread, they soaked it all with pure liquid fat. And there was I sitting beside him, gnawing at my piece of infernal beef, the sinewy hip of some hateful Galloway stott that had died of the blackleg, and, having been unfit for ought else, had been dried till the hateful substance was out of it. Yet I had my choice of both, and took this. I shall never wish any friend of mine to

suffer such pangs as I did that morning; for all that I had suffered in my dangers and disappointments was nothing to them. I would fain have slain the Gorb privately; but not daring to do that, I resolved never to see his face again, after the vile trick he had played. All my hopes and all my enjoyments of the foray being now ended, I resolved on taking my departure, and that by the time my enemy had the first slice of bacon eaten.

We had orders to halt all that day, for the Johnstons and the Jardines were a day's march before us. Their advanced columns had fallen back; and as the troops were sleeping or straggling about, I prepared for my departure. My comrade having been with the knight's women all the night, a set of creatures madder than himself, he was quite worn out; and as soon as he got his inside lined with the salutary beverage, he fell fast asleep. An inward light now began to dawn on my heart, brighter than the sun at noon day, and lighting my steps forward to future felicity. My breath cut short with ecstatic delight, and my knees trembled as I formed the resolution of changing hams with my hopeful comrade. His wallet was lying open – not so the tailor's eyes: I might have exchanged coats, and shoes too, for him. The great work was done in an instant. I whipped out his shoulder of bacon, and put my piece of black timber in its place. 'Take you that, honest man,' said I to myself: 'Time about is fair play. I have given you something that will exercise your jaws for a while.'

When I found that I had this most delicious of all morsels on my back, I was so light that I scarcely felt my feet touch the ground; and there being no time now to lose, I made straight away into England; for I durst not turn towards Scotland, the sentinels being so very thick on that quarter. Our advanced guard was composed of the Gordons from the Ken – a set of desperate raggamuffins whom I durst not have gone among had it not been fair forenoon. I had my wallet on my back and my sword by my side; and when I saw any of them eyeing me, I went up to them and asked how far the Johnstons were before us?

'What the devil was I wanting with the Johnstons?'

'O, I was afraid there might be a battle fought before I saw it, which I would not should happen for any thing in the world.'

'Hear to the coulter-nibbit piper,' said one.

'He is as like supping a pint o' fat brose as killing an Englishman,' said another.

‘I wadna trust him wi’ ought beyond a litter o’ English pigs,’ said a third.

‘Let him gang forrit, and fiend that he get his chafts clawn the first sword that’s drawn! I wadna that his name were Gordon for a hunder civis.’

Accordingly I got liberty to pass; but as soon as I got out of sight, I turned to the left, and escaped to the moors of Bewcastle. I had now found out the invaluable art of flint and frizzle, and could kindle a fire whenever I pleased. So I sought out a lonely wild dell, and lighting a fire of birns and strong heather, roasted two slashing slices of my shoulder of bacon. I also took a good shave of bread from my friend the tailor’s hearth-bannock; but after all I could not think of adulterating the savoury delicious fare by any unnatural intermixture – so I ate up the dry bread by itself, and then smacked up the bacon afterwards. I cannot describe my sensations of delight, not only in my meal, but in contemplating the beauty of the object. I sat long feasting my eyes on the beauty of the slices before I committed them to the coals. They were curved so beautifully in semi-circles, the fat and the lire time about, that, unless for such an object, the term *beauty* would have no meaning. They lay alternately, as if it were this way, and this way.

‘I protest against your drawing of your pictures on my shoulder,’ cried Gibbie; ‘and also against the party being any longer mocked with such fulsome trash in place of a story. Do you not perceive, Sir Master, and do you not all perceive, that he is havering and speaking without end or aim? He is sensible that he has failed in his story; and that a dismal fate awaits him, and all that he is now intent on is driving of time.’

‘I confess that I am sick of the bacon and other fat things,’ said Charlie.

‘My soul disdains the abject theme,’ said the poet: ‘Its tantalizing sight is like the marshfire’s vacant gleam to the bewildered wight. ’Tis throwing meat to hungry souls, with fainting sore opprest; or drink unto the parched lips, whereof they may not taste.’

‘Let us show some spirit, wretched as we are,’ said Gibbie, ‘and protest with one assent against being farther sickened, as well as mocked by such loathsome stuff.’

‘This is unfair, and using undue influence,’ cried Tam. ‘None of you were thus interrupted, but got time to finish your stories as you liked. Mine is not done; the best part of it is yet to come, and I say it is unfair. Great Master, you sit as judge; I appeal to you. My life has been varied. Let them chuse what sort of a theme they want, and I will fit them, only suffer me to relate one other exploit.’

The Master, on whom hunger seemed to make no impression, thought the request was reasonable; but in making choice, every one of them, young and old, pitched on a different subject, so that Tam could not get proceeded; neither can this chapter, as an extraordinary incident befel, which naturally brings it to an end.

CHAPTER 21

And he said unto Satan, whence comest thou?
And he answered, and said, thou knowest it is true,
That I come from wandering on the earth,
And from going to and fro on it,
Like a masterless dog, with my bow-wow-wow.

Zach. Boyd's Bible

At the very time they were disputing about the right of Tam to proceed with his tale, their ears were astounded by a loud hollo! at the gate. Every man's heart leaped for joy, and every one was instantly on his feet; but Charlie was first on the platform, and answered the hollo! with full stentorian voice. The same voice called again,

'A Bellandine.'

'Where bye?' answered Charlie.

'By the moon,' said the voice.

'And the seven stars!' rejoined Yardbire, clapping his hands, and shouting for joy, 'The Warden for ever! My chief for ever! He is the man that cares for his own! Ah! he is the noble master.'

Charlie well knew the voice that hailed him. It was that of his friend and companion in arms, Dan Chisholm, whom the Warden had indeed despatched all the way from Northumberland to Aikwood, to see what was become of his embassy, with six-and-twenty chosen troopers. Charlie Scott's arm was a bulwark of strength, and his breast a tower of fidelity, the value of which Sir Ringan knew how to estimate, while his acts of kindness and regard made a deep impression on Charlie's honest unsophisticated heart; and before he would say a word about the situation of either himself or his associates, he caused Dan to inform him of the Warden's fortune and success in their absence. Being satisfied concerning these, he called out,

'What ither uncos, Dan? What mair news are come out?'

‘O, God shield you!’ cried Dan, ‘Do nae ye ken that the world’s amaist turned up-side-down sin ye left us? The trees hae turned their wrang ends upmost – the waters hae drowned the towns, and the hills hae been rent asunder and riddled up like heaps o’ chaff. ’Tis thought that there has been a seige o’ hell, and that the citadel has been won, for the deils are a’ broken loose and rinning jabbering through the land. They hae been seen, and they hae been heard; and nae man kens what’s to be the issue, or what’s to fa’ out neist.’

‘Blaw lown, Dan; ye dinna ken wha may hear ye,’ said Charlie. ‘’We hae had hand in these matters oursels: But for the sake of a’ that’s dear to you and to us bring gavelocks and ern mells, pinching-bars, and howies, and break open every gate, bar, and door in this castle; for here are we a’ imprisoned on the top of it, and famishing to dead wi’ hunger and starvation.’

‘That I will do wi’ a’ expedition,’ answered Dan. ‘It is a shame for the master of the castle to imprison his kinsmen’s friends, who came to him in peace and good fellowship. What strength of opposition holds he?’

‘Nane, good Chisholm, but these gates. The great Master is himself a prisoner, and suffering with us.’

‘That dings a’!’ said Dan; ‘I canna understand it! But it’s a’ ane for that; ye maunna stay there. I shall gar his gates flee a’ into as mony flinders as there are hairs on his grey beard.’

‘If you demolish one bar of these gates, young man,’ cried the Master fiercely, ‘You do it at your peril.’

‘So I do, and so I will,’ answered Dan: ‘Either bring down my friends and companions to me this instant, or – I have orders – and here goes.’

‘Man of mystery and of misery, what dost thou mean?’ said the friar. ‘Lo I have saved thy life; and if thou refusest to let us escape from the face of death, I will even throw thee from the top of thy tower, and they blood shall be sprinkled on the wall.’

The Master gave him a fierce look, but made no reply. As he strode the battlement, however, he muttered to himself with great violence, ‘Does the Christian dog dare to beard me thus? To what am I fallen? I am fallen low, but not to this. And not to know what I am! nor what power remains with me? Would that I were in the midst of my arcana and of the spirits once

more! Young warrior, use your liberty. Break up and demolish. Set us all free, and see who is the profiter.'

Dan scarcely needed such permission. He and twenty others had each a stone of at least half his own weight heaved on his shoulder, which, at a given signal, they all dashed on the gate at once. The bars bent, but nothing gave way; and it was not before the twentieth broadside, in the same irresistible style, that the cross bars became like a bow and the lock slipped. As for the large bolt, one of the men had climbed over the counterguard on the shoulders of the rest and drawn it. When they came to the gate of the castle, entrance seemed hopeless. It was steadfast and immoveable, the door being double. Dan bellowed for the porter, and asked those on the top what was become of him; but none made answer to his rash question. After waiting a while for it, with his face placed horizontally, he muttered to himself, 'Aha! mum there! He has gane nae gude gate, I'll warrant him. It's a queer place this, an' as queer folk about it.'

'What's queer about it, lad?' said a strange voice through the key hole, whence it would not speak again.

They had nothing for it but to begin with such awkward mattocks as they had, namely, a score of huge stones; but, to their excessive joy, the doors gave both way at the first assault. This was owing to a most fortunate blunder of the friar, who, during the time he was in possession of the keys, had gone forth to provide for his mule, which he did in an ample manner, but, on returning, had either been unable or unwilling to turn the tremendous locks again into their sockets; and open flew the gates with a jarring sound. Of course, it was not long till our yeomen were thundering at the iron door on the small stair. It was a double door of strong iron bars, and the lock was inclosed between them, so that all attempts to open it appeared fruitless, one man only being able to get to it at once, (that is, one on each side,) and these had no footing. After tugging at it in vain for a space, Dan swore that, to open it, it would be necessary either to begin at the top of the tower and demolish downward, or at the bottom and demolish upward. This appeared a job so tedious to starving people, that it was agreed to feed them with meat and drink through the bars. Every man readily proffered the contents of his wallet; but the getting of these through the bars required ingenuity. They poured the meal through in tubes made of leather, and water and strong drink in the same way; but the flesh could only be got through in

long small pieces; and Tam Craik having taken his station at the back of the door, in order to hand up the provisions to his companions, none of the butcher-meat (as it is now called) found its way farther. By the time they had got a supply of meal, water, and distilled liquor, some of Dan's party, by the direction of the Master, went to bring mattocks for raising the stair, and forcing a passage through below the door; others had gone to the brook for more water; so that none remained in the narrow stair save Dan Chisholm and another person.

By this time there was one who had been silently watching the progress of affairs at Aikwood castle, where he had long been accustomed to reckon on every thing as his own; but now there were some things passed under his potent eye, the true motives for which he could not comprehend, and these actions were still growing more and more equivocal; so he resolved on trusting his sworn vassals no more to their own guardianship, but to take an active management in guiding the events that so deeply concerned his honour and power. Who this august personage was the reader will scarcely guess. He may perhaps discover it in the detail.

It was wearing toward evening, the sun being either set or hid behind dark clouds; for, short as these tales may appear as here related by Isaac the curate, they had taken a day in telling by the wights themselves. The individuals who had been shut up were all light of heart and rejoicing. Delany had fainted in ecstacy, or partly, perhaps, by exhaustion, but was soon recovered by a cup of cold water. They had got plenty of stores laid in for a night and more; so that they were freed from the dread of perishing by starvation, or saving their lives by a resource of all others the most repulsive to humanity. Such was the state of affairs, when the most appalling noise was heard somewhere about the castle – a noise which neither could be described nor the cause of it discovered. The people below ran out to the court or to the tops of the outer walls, and those above to the battlements – but they saw nothing save the troopers' horses scowering off in all directions, every one of them snorting aloud, and cocking their heads and their tails. Tam Craik and Dan Chisholm were still standing with their noses close to the iron door, and conversing through it. Another trooper stood close at Dan's back; and, when the rushing sound arose, the one said to the other,

'What the devil is that?'

‘Take care wha ye speak about here, friend, or wi’ reverence be it spoken,’ said Tam. Then turning round, he called out, ‘Yardbire, what hurly-burly is that?’

‘I cannot tell,’ answered Charlie; ‘only I think the devil be entered into the horses.’

Tam, who did not hear distinctly from the top, answered Dan thus: ‘He says it’s only the devil entered into the horses.’ Dan was just about to reply, when the trooper tapped him on the shoulder, and said in a whisper, ‘Hush, squire! Good Lord! look what is behind us.’ He looked about, and saw a terrific being standing on the landing-place, beckoning him to come down. From an irresistible impulse, he lost no time in obeying; and, pushing the trooper down before him, he descended the steps. When he came to the bottom he got a full view of the figure, that stood upright between two pilasters, with its face straight to the aperture that lighted the place. One may judge of our yeomen’s feelings when they gazed on a being which they always described as follows:

It appeared about double the human size, both in might and proportion, its whole body being of the colour of bronze, as well as the crown upon its head. The skin appeared shrivelled, as if seared with fire, but over that there was a polish that glittered and shone. Its eyes had no pupil nor circle of white; they appeared like burning lamps deep in their sockets; and when it gazed, they rolled round with a circular motion. There was a hairy mantle hung down and covered its feet that they could not be seen; but Dan saw its right hand, as it pointed to them to retire, every finger of which terminated in a long crooked talon that seemed of the colour of molten gold. It once opened its mouth, not as if to speak but to breathe, and as it stooped forward at the time, both of them saw it within. It had neither teeth, tongue, nor throat, its whole inside being hollow, and of the colour of burning glass.

It pointed with its right hand across its bosom for them to be gone, and, as they passed by with hurried strides, it drew a stroke with its paw which threatened to send them heels over head down the stair; but it withheld the blow in a moment, as if moved to some higher revenge; and all the way down the great winding stair, it followed and showered on them such a torrent of burning sulphur that they were almost overwhelmed, all the while vomiting it from its burning bosom, with a noise that resembled the hissing of a thousand great serpents. Besides this, on every landing-place there

were a pair of monsters placed as guards, immense snakes, bears, tigers, and lions, all with eyes like burning candles. For all these, our two yeomen still kept their feet, which was a wonder, and escaped fairly into the court of the castle.

When they arrived there, every one of their companions had taken leg-bail, and were running as if for death or life; and after what our two champions had seen, there was no occasion to bid them run after the others. Those above heard only the rushing noise, which still increased as long as there was one of those below within the gate, but they saw nothing further – and wondered not a little when they saw first the horses run away, and then the men after them. When Charlie saw that they *were* gone, and his brother-in-arms Dan leaving the outer-gate the last, he called after him to go *by the mill, and see that Corbie got plenty of water*.

What our prisoners had witnessed was, like every thing else about that castle, quite incomprehensible. Even the great Master himself was manifestly at a loss; when he first heard the sound, and saw the beginning of the confusion, his eyes beamed with exultation. He gave three stamps with his foot, and called aloud, as to some invisible being, in an unknown tongue; but on receiving no answer his countenance fell, and he looked on in gloomy mood.

The flyers vanished after their horses on the hill to the eastward of the castle. Once a few of them rallied and faced about; but on the next one coming up they betook them again to their heels; and thus was our hapless embassy left in the same state as before, save that they were rather in higher spirits, their situation being now known, and instant death averted. After they had refreshed themselves, most of them fell into a slumber; but at length, as the evening advanced, the poet claimed his privilege of telling a story. Some of them proposed that the conversation should be general instead, seeing the great stake for which they contended was now, in all likelihood, superseded. The poet, however, was of a different opinion, on the ground that the highest stake, in his estimation, still remained. ‘What though my life may not be forfeited,’ said he, ‘to feed the hungry and carnivorous maw of this outrageous baconist; although my warm and oozing blood may not be sucked up like the stagnant marsh by bittern vile, or by the tawney snipe; yea, though my joints should not be skatched and collared by the steel, or sinews gnawed up by officious grinder: What’s that

to me? a gem of higher worth, of richer acceptation, still remains. Beauty unsullied! pure simplicity! with high endowments, in affliction nursed, and cramped by bondage! Oh my very heart yearns to call such a pearl of lustre mine! A kindred soul! A bosom friend! A oh – oh – oach.'

Charlie hasted to clap his hand on the poet's mouth, as he burst out a-crying, 'Hout, hout, Colly!' said he, 'I am quite o' your opinion; but truly this is carrying the joke ower far. I wish ye maunna hae been hauddin rather freely to your head o' thae strong liquors; for the singing crew are a' drowthy deils, ilk ane o' them. Whisht, whisht, and ye sal tell your tale, or sing your sang, which you like; and then you are free to take a collop, or gie a collop, wi' the best o' them.'

'I flatter myself that's rather a good thing? Eh?' said the poet.

'What thing?' said the other.

'The song that we overheard just now. Do you know who made that song? Eh?'

'Not I.'

'But you have heard our maidens chaunt it – have you not? God bless them! Sweet, dear, sweet, sweet creatures! Why, Sir, that song happens to be mine; and I think I may say, without vanity, it is as good a thing of the kind as you ever heard? Eh?'

'Faith, I believe it is,' said Charlie – not knowing well what to say, for he had heard no song whatever; and then turning to the rest, while the poet was enlarging on the excellency of his song, he said, in an under voice, 'Gude faith, the poet's either gaen clean daft, or else he's drunk. What shall I say to him?'

The poet tapped him on the shoulder, seeing he was not paying attention.

'It is not for this, I say, that I judge the piece worthy of attention; nor yet what it shows of ability, hability, docility, or any of the terms that end in *ility*; nor for its allegory, category, or any of the terms that end in *ory*. Neither is it for its versification, imagination, nor any of the thousand abominable terms that end in *ation*. No, sir, the properties of all my songs, I am thankful to Saint Martin, end in *icity* and *uity*. You know the song, Yardbire?'

'O yes. Quite weel.'

'What do you think of the eleventh verse? Let me see. No, it is the thirteenth verse.' 'Good Friday! are there so many?' 'Hem – m – m. The

tenth is, the Ox-eye, I am sure of that. The eleventh is the Millstone. The twelfth, the Cloudberry and the Shepherd Boy. The thirteenth, is the Gander and Water-Wagtail. It is the fourteenth. What do you think of the fourteenth? Ay, it is the Gowans and the Laverock that you will like best. You remember that, I am sure?'

'O yes; to be sure I do –.' (Aside,) 'Good Lord, the poet's horn mad! Heard ever any body the like o' this?'

'How is this it runs? Ay,

When the bluart bears a pearl,
  And the daisy turns a pea,
And the bonny lucken gowan
  Has fauldit up his ee,
Then the laverock frae the blue lift,
  Doops down and thinks nae shame
To woo his bonny lassie,
  When the kye come hame.'

'The song is good, and the music of the song also is delectable,' said the friar; 'but the voice of the singer is like a sweet psaltery that hath lost a string, and hath its belly rent by the staff of the beater. Lo, I would even delight to hear the song from beginning to end.' 'Sing it, poet, and let it stand for the tale,' cried two of them at once. 'That I will not,' answered he; 'I will tell my tale in my own style, and my own manner, as the rest have done: nevertheless, if my throat were not so dry, I would sing the song.' 'It is plain what he wants,' said Charlie. 'Tis the gate wi' a' the minstrels – *wet the whistle, or want the spring*.'

Charlie handed him another cup of strong drink, desiring him to take it off and sing. He did the first freely, and attempted the second with equal alacrity; but his voice and memory both failed him by the way, to the great amusement of the whole party – even the captive boy screamed with laughter, and the great Master was twice constrained to smile. But we must describe this scene as Isaac himself gives it.

The poet was sitting on a bench, with Charlie on the one hand, and Delany on the other; and, fixing his eyes on the ceiling, and clasping his hands, which he heaved up at every turn of the tune, he went on thus:

THE SWEETEST THING THE BEST THING

A Song

VERSE FIRST

Come tell me a' you shepherds
That love the tarry woo',
And tell me a' you jolly boys
That whistle at the plow,
What is the greatest bliss
That the tongue of man can name,
'Tis 'To woo a bonny lassie
When the kye come hame.'
When the kye come hame,
When the kye come hame,
'Tween the gloaming and the mirk,
When the kye come hame.

That's the burden, or the quoir, as father Cormack calls it; – the o'erword, like.

VERSE SECOND

'Tis not beneath the burgonet,
Nor yet beneath the crown,
'Tis not on couch of velvet,
Nor yet in bed of down;
'Tis beneath the spreading birch
In the dell without the name,
Wi' a bonny bonny lassie,
When the kye come hame.
When the kye come hame, &c.

VERSE THIRD

There the blackbird bigs his nest

For the mate he lo’es to see,
And on the topmost bough,
Oh a happy bird is he!
There he pours his melting ditty,
And love ’tis a’ the theme;
And he’ll woo his bonny lassie
When the kye come hame.
When the kye come hame, &c.

VERSE FOURTH

When the little wee bit heart
Rises high in the breast,
And the little wee bit starn
Rises red in the east,
O there’s a joy sae dear,
That the heart can hardly frame,
Wi’ a bonny bonny lassie,
When the kye come hame.
When the kye come hame, &c.

VERSE FIFTH

Then the eye shines sae bright,
The hale soul to beguile,
There’s love in every whisper,
And joy in every smile.
O wha wad chuse a crown
Wi’ its perils and its fame,
And miss a bonny lassie
When the kye come hame.
When the kye come hame, &c.

Here the poet warred a long time with recollection, always repeating, ‘I made the thing, and it is impossible I can forget it – I can’t comprehend –’ At length he sung the following verse, which he said was the fifteenth.

VERSE THE FIFTEENTH

See yonder pawky shepherd,
That lingers on the hill,
His ewes are in the fauld
And his lambs are lying still;
Yet he downa gang to bed,
For his heart is in a flame,
To meet his bonnie lassie,
When the kye come hame.
When the kye come hame, &c.

VERSE SIXTEENTH AND LAST

Away wi' fame and fortune,
What comfort can they gie?
And a' the arts that prey
On man's life and libertye;
Gie me the highest joy
That the heart of man can frame,
My bonny, bonny lassie,
When the kye come hame.
When the kye come hame,
When the kye come hame,
'Tween the gloaming and the mirk,
When the kye come hame.

'I made the thing,' added the poet; 'but God knows how I have forgot it. Since I came to the top of this cursed tower, the wind has blown it out of my head.' With these words he fell into a profound sleep, which they suffered him to enjoy, before he began his competition. In the meantime, Isaac relates an extraordinary story of a certain consultation that took place in the castle in that very interim, but does not say on what authority he had it, none of the parties yet named having apparently heard it.

The castle of Aikwood, says he, being left as before, an ample and perilous void, some old and frequent inmates took undisputed possession.

The leader and convoker of this gang was no other than the Master Fiend who ordered our yeomen out of the castle, and chased them forth, with so little ceremony. In the great Master's study was his gigantic and commanding frame placed at the end of the board, while the three pages, Prig, Prim, and Pricker, were waiting his beck.

'Come nigh me, my friends,' said he; 'and read me what is to be done with this king of mighty conjurors now?'

'What thou willest, our Lord and Master,' was the reply: 'Give the command with the power, and thy pleasure shall be done.'

'How canst thou answer for thy negligence in suffering this cowled and canting vagabond to gain admittance here with his saws and parables, his crosiers and his writings?'

'We meant to devour him, but our power extended not to it. Thou hast seen the bones of one whom we suspected.'

'You are indolent and wayward slaves. Either separate our greatest vassal on earth from this captious professor, or you shall be punished with many stripes. Our sway is dishonoured if such a man as he is suffered to take shelter under a crosier, and there hold our power at bay – our control at defiance –.' 'Return to him that power which since his dejection has been withdrawn, and you are sure of him still. Riches and honours he despises: feasting and wine-bibing he abhors: but for power to do what no other man can perform, he would sell twenty souls, were they in his power of disposal.'

'He is a great man, and well suited for our free independent government. By his principle of insubordination to established authorities, I yet hope to bring all mankind to my own mind and my own country. Read me my riddle, you three slaves. What is the most hateful thing in nature?'

'A saint.'

'More ready than right, and more right than ingenious. Show cause.'

'Because he is the greatest coward, and all that he does springs from the detestable passion of terror.'

'Right. Which being is the most noble?'

'The opposer of all established authorities ordained by the tyrant of the universe.'

'Right! Right! These are the men for me, and of these this Master was a great ensample. Therefore, Separate! Separate! Separate! My elemental

power is solemnly engaged; but on the morning of the third day, it shall be given to you to work again at your Master's will. Till that time it will be as well to prevent all ingress and egress here; and at that time I will come again. Speed you well, nimble noddies; shape well and shard well, and the day is your own. While I transform my shape, sing me the song that I love. Whenever I hear it, my furtherance is the better.' The imps complied, and the redoubted fiend laughed till the walls of the castle shook, while those on the top took it for the great bittern of the Hartwood, called there the Bogbumper.

HYMN TO THE DEVIL

Speed thee, speed thee!
Liberty lead thee!
Many this night shall hearken and heed thee.
Far abroad,
Demigod!
What shall appal thee?
Javel, or Devil, or how shall we call thee?
Thine the night voices of joy and of weeping,
The whisper awake, and the vision when sleeping:
The bloated kings of the earth shall brood
On princedoms and provinces bought with blood,
Shall slumber, and snore, and to-morrow's breath
Shall order the muster and march of death:
The trumpets shall sound, and the gonfalons flee,
And thousands of souls step home to thee.
Speed thee, speed thee, &c.

The warrior shall dream of battle begun,
Of field-day and foray, and foeman undone;
Of provinces sacked, and warrior store,
Of hurry and havoc, and hampers of ore;
Of captive maidens for joys abundant,
And ransom vast when these grow redundant.
Hurray! for the foray. Fiends ride forth a souling,

For the dogs of havock are yelping and yowling.
Speed thee, speed thee, &c.

Make the bedesman's dream
With treasure to teem;
To-day and to-morrow
He has but one aim,
And 'tis still the same, and 'tis still the same.
But well thou knowest the sot's demerit,
His richness of flesh, and his poorness of spirit;
And well thy images thou canst frame,
On canvas of pride, with pencil of flame:
A broad demesne is a view of glory,
For praying a soul from purgatory:
And, O let the dame be fervent and fair,
Amorous, and righteous, and husband beware!
For there's a confession so often repeated,
The eyes are enlightened, the life-blood is heated.
Hish! – Hush! – soft foot and silence,
The sons of the abbot are lords of the Highlands,
Thou canst make lubbard and lighthead agree,
Wallow a while, and come home to thee.
Speed thee, speed thee, &c.

Where goest thou next, by hamlet or shore,
When kings, when warriors, and priests are o'er?
These for thee have the most to do,
And these are the men must be looked unto.
On courtier deign not to look down,
Who swells at a smile, and faints at a frown.
With noble maid stay not to parle,
But give her one glance of the golden arle.
Then, oh, there's a creature thou needs must see,
Upright, and saintly, and stern is she!
'Tis the old maid, with visage demure,
With cat on her lap, and dogs on the floor,

Master, she'll prove a match for thee,
With her psalter, and crosier, and Ave Mari.
Move her with things above and below,
Tickle her and teaze her from lip to toe;
Should all prove vain, and nothing can move;
If dead to ambition, and cold to love,
One pasion still success will crown,
A glorious energy all thine own!
'Tis envy; a die that never can fail
With children, matron, or maiden stale.
Shew them in dreams from night to day
A happy mother, and offspring gay;
Show them the maiden in youthful prime,
Followed and wooed, improving her time;
And their hearts wil sicken with envy and spleen,
A leperous jaundice of yellow and green:
And though frightened for hell to a boundless degree,
They'll singe their dry perriwigs yet with thee.
Speed thee, speed thee, &c.

Where goest thou next? Where wilt thou hie thee?
Still there is rubbish enough to try thee.
Whisper the matron of lordly fame,
There's a greater than she in splendor and name;
And her bosom shall swell with the grievous load,
And torrents of slander shall volley abroad,
Imbued with venom and bitter despair:
O sweet are the sounds to the Prince of the Air!
Reach the proud yeoman a bang with a spear,
And the tippling burgess a yerk on the ear;
Put fees in the eye of the poisoning leech,
And give the dull peasant a kick on the breech:
As for the flush maiden, the rosy elf,
You may pass her by, she will dream of herself.
But that all may be gain, and nothing loss,
Keep eye on the men with the cowl and the cross;

Then shall the world go swimming before thee,
In a full tide of liberty, licence, and glory!
Speed thee, speed thee, &c.

Hail, patriot spirit! thy labours be blest!
For of all great reformers thyself wert the first;
Thou wert the first, with discernment strong,
To perceive that all rights divine were wrong;
And long hast thou spent thy sovereign breath,
In heaven above and in earth beneath,
And roared it from thy burning throne,
The glory of independence alone;
Proclaiming to all, with fervor and irony,
That kingly dominion's all humbug and tyranny;
And whoso listeth may be free,
For freedom, full freedom's the word with thee!
That life has its pleasures – the rest is a sham,
And all that comes after a flim and a flam!
Speed thee! Speed thee!
Liberty lead thee!
Many this night shall hearken and heed thee.
  Hie abroad,
  Demigod!
Who shall defame thee?
King of the Elements! how shall we name thee?

As the imps concluded their song, our prisoners on the top of the castle perceived a large rough watch-dog jogging out at the gate of the castle, and following in the direction of the fugitives. When the brute saw that he was perceived he turned round, set up his snout toward the battlements, and uttered a loud bow-wow-wow, which, when the great Master heard, he started to his feet, and, with wild staring looks, and his hair standing on end, took shelter behind the friar.

'Behold thou, and see with thine eyes, that it is only a watch-dog come from the camp of our captain,' said the friar. 'Lo, thy very nature is changed since first I saw thee.'

‘Then would to the gods that I had never seen thee, or that I had seen thee sooner,’ said the Master; and strode away to discourage any farther reply. The dog followed the fugitives, and bent his course toward the mill.

That being the next inhabited house to the eastward, Dan Chisholm and his yeomen landed all there; and in full assembly he related, to their terror and astonishment, how he had seen the devil himself and several of his monstrous agents, who had chased him from the castle, spuing fire and brimstone on him like a cataract. The rest said, that though they had not seen the devil, they had seen and heard enough to put any rational being out of his senses, and as much as to teach them never to go there again. Dan swore that they were not to be taught any such thing; for, said he, ‘Our captain’s friends, and our own brethren in arms, are most unwarrantably, and I must also say unaccountably, confined there – and we will either free them or perish in the attempt. I can find plenty of holy men that, with book and candle, can withstand the devil, and shall make him flee from his stronghold like fire from the flint. If I had the gospel friar on the one side of him, and Father Brand, or Capuchin Cairnabie, on the other, I shall gar him skip.’ While Dan was in the middle of this speech, in comes the great rough watch-dog; who, after fawning on some of the warriors as on old acquaintances, took his station in a dark corner of the miller’s thronged hall, and began a licking his feet, but at the same time taking good heed to all that passed. It was finally agreed that Dan and a companion should ride straight to Melrose, and represent their case to the holy abbot there, who was devoted to the interests of their captain, and who, it was not doubted, would devise means of expelling the old demon from his guardship, and letting free their friends, who were all baptised men and good Christians. As they formed these sapient devices, many hard things were said of the devil; and our warriors seemed rather inclined to make a laughing-stock of him, till the miller’s maid interrupted them with the following question:

‘Wha o’ you trooper chaps does this maskis dog belang to?’

‘To nane o’ us,’ was answered by several at the same time.

‘I wish ye wad tent him, then,’ said she, ‘for, this wee while bygane, his een hae been glentin like twa blue burnin candles. I wish he be nae a mad ane.’

‘Sneck doors, and out swords,’ cried the miller: ‘We’ll hae him proven.’

The doors were shut, and the yeomen surrounded the dog with their drawn weapons. The poor beast lay as harmlesslike as a lamb, with his head upon his fore feet so as to hide them, turning up his eyes from below his shaggy brows in a beseeching manner, and wagging his tail till it played thump, thump, on the floor. But this did not hinder the miller from reconnoitring, though it gave him rather a favourable opinion of his shaggy guest. 'Poor fellow,' said the miller, 'wha's dog may ye be?' The dog forgot himself; he lifted up his head in a kind acknowledging manner to the miller, who, looking narrowly at him, cried out: 'A marvel!, a marvel! saw ever ony mortal man the like o' this? Here's a tyke wi' cloven cloots like a gait, fairney cloots and a' thegither. The Holy Virgin be wi' us! I believe we hae gotten the—'

Here the miller was interrupted, without getting the sentence concluded. The dog sprung to his feet, appearing twice as big as when he entered. 'Bow-wow-wow!' roared he in the miller's face with the voice of an enraged lion; 'Bow-wow-wow!' And as he bayed from side to side on the warrior circle, they all retreated backward till the wall stopped them. Well might they – for they perceived, by his open mouth, the same appearance that Dan had before witnessed, namely, a stomach and chest of burning flame. 'Bow-wow-wow!' reiterated he: 'Youph, youph, youph.' All fled back aghast: but the attack was of short duration. The miller had a huge fire of seeds, above a burning log of wood, which he had heaped on for the comfort of his guests. When the dog reached that, he broke into it, appearing to bury himself in the coil of fiery dust. It flashed upwards in millions of burning atoms, and in the midst of them up flew the dog out at the top of the lum, with a tremendous 'Bow-wow-wow!'

All was silence for a few seconds, while our yeomen stood in a circle, with their weapons drawn, and their backs at the wall, gaping with affright, and staring on one another. 'By Saint Thomas, we are haunted!' cried Dan, breaking silence; 'That is the same chap I forgathered wi' afore in the staircase of the castle, I ken him by his lowin lungs, though he has changed his shape.' He was interrupted by a loud laugh on the top of the house, and a voice that said, in a jeering tone, 'Ha, ha, ha! Andrew Chisholm is that you? I have found out a' your plans – and ride you to Melrose, or ride you to Dryburgh, I'll be there afore you to lend you a lift. Ay, and I'll keep Aikwood castle in spite o' you and a' your master's men.'

Dan could not contain his indignation on hearing this brag. He ran forward to the brace, put his neck under it, and turning his nose up the lum (or rustic chimney) answered, ‘Deil o’ that ye’re fit to do, auld tyke. Ye’re but a liar at best and the father o’ liars. Gang and toast heathen bacon in your ain het hame. What seek ye here amang leel men?’

‘Weel answered, and like yoursel, Dan!’ said one of the yeomen, and slapped him on the shoulder, which rousing his spirit still farther, he added, ‘Confound you Robin’s Geordie o’ Feindhope-haugh, what for didna ye strike when the foul thief set up his gousty gab at your nose wi’ his impudent bow-wow-wow; I see nae right ony o’ God’s creatures hae to be hurlbarrowed out o’ their standing wi’ him.’

As he finished the remark, there was something came to the door, and gave two or three rude impatient scratches, exactly in the same manner that a strong dog does that wants to be in. This instantly changed the cheer of our sturdy group, that with one involuntary movement closed round the hearth, at the point the most distant from the door.

‘That’s him again,’ said the miller’s lass.

‘The Lord forbid,’ said the miller: ‘I wonder what multure he wants frae me. Though I live on the lands of a Master of Arts, I had nae inkling that I was thirl to hell. Brave lads, can nane of you rhame a mass, a credo, or a paternoster? He is but a coward at best; I hae kend a monk, wi’ his crosier and his cowl, chace him like a rabbit.’

‘I fear we’ll prove but lame hands at that,’ said Dan, ‘and think we had better sally out on him sword in hand, and see what he can either say or do for himself. But, Chryste, I needna say that, considering that I ken sae weel what his lining’s made of.’

‘I hae a cross and chain in the house,’ said the miller, ‘that was consecrated at the shrine of St Bothan; whoever will be our leader shall bear that before him, and we’ll bang the auld thief away frae our bigging.’

The scratching was renewed with redoubled fury. Our yeomen crowded closer around the fire, till all at once their ears were saluted by a furious ‘bow-wow-wow’ down the lum, which, in spite of their utmost resolution, scattered them like a covey of heath-fowl over which the hawk is hovering, when every one endeavours to shift for itself, and hide in its own heather bush.

Their faces were by this time flushed with shame as well as fear, that they should be thus cuffed about by ‘the auld thief,’ as they styled him. Resolved, therefore, to make one great and strenuous effort, the miller brought out his consecrated cross, some tied sticks, and others horn spoons across, till all were armed with the same irresistible symbol, and then they marshalled up before the fire, uncovered their heads, and with the ensigns reared before them, waited for a moment the word of command to march out to the grand attack. The arch fiend, not choosing to wait the issue, raised such a horse laugh on the top of the lum that their ears were deafened with the noise; and clapping his paws that sounded like the strokes of battering ram’s horns, he laughed till the upper and nether millstones chattered against each other, and away he bounded through the clouds of the night, apparently in an agony of laughter.

‘Aha! there he goes!’ said Dan: ‘There’s nae guidance to be had o’ him, and as little mense in meddling wi’ him.’

‘Ay, let him e’en gang,’ said the miller; ‘he’s the warst mouse o’ the mill. Ane had better tine the blind bitch’s litter than hae the mill singed wi’ brimstone. I lurd rather deal wi’ the thankless maltster, that neither gi’es coup, neivefu’, nor lippie, than wi’ him. I have no part of the breviary but a glorious preamble; kneel till I repeat it.’

The troopers kneeled round the miller, who, lifting up his hands, said, with great fervour, ‘O semper timidum scelus! Obstupui, steteruntque comae et vox faucibus haesit. O Deus; nusquam tuta fides! Amen.’ ‘Amen!’ repeated all the group, and arose greatly strengthened and encouraged by the miller’s *preamble*.

They spent that night around the miller’s hearth, and had a cog of good brose to their supper. The next morning Dan and two associates rode off for Melrose, to lay their case before the friendly abbot, and to beg assistance; which, notwithstanding the devil’s brag, they were not afraid of obtaining. But the important events that followed must be related in course, while we return to those friends in their elevated confinement, to whom that night the poet related the following tale.

CHAPTER 22

Lord Duf. Did you not wake them, Cornaro?
Cor. Alas! my lord, I could not.
Their slumber was so deep, it seemed to me
A sleep eternal. Not a sleep of death,
But of extatic silence. Such a beam
Of joy and happiness I ne'er beheld
Shed from the human face.

The Prioress, A Tragedy

The Poet's Tale

Fain would I tell my friends and fellow sufferers of my translation hence. Of all the joys and ecstacies of that celestial clime, ycleped the land of faery; were it not that one is here whose sex forbids it, and whose gentle nature from such a tale would shrink, as doth the flower before the nipping gale. You all have heard of that celestial form, the white lady? And of that wan and beatific presence there lives in my remembrance some faint image of saintly beauty. But list to me, my friends, and do not smile, far less break forth with loud uncourteous neigh, like war horse in the charge – vile waste of breath! convulsive, unrestrained. But hear the truth: *It was not she who bore me from this land* – not she, *the white lady*, as all divined. No, it was a form of flesh, and that flesh too of most rare quality. Fair, witching, plump, rosy and amorous; and of unmarred proportions. Sooth, she who lured me from my rustic home no other was than wandering minstreless, queen of the mightiest harper ever born. Sole empress of a tuneful wayward choir, thoughtless and giddy. But their music stole my very soul away. What could I do but follow it, to listen and to sing. In that bright train I sought the Scottish court, the nobles' hall, and every motely scene of loud festivity throughout the land. There have I heard and seen such scenes of love, of dalliance, and of mirth, of deep intrigue and violent cruelty, as eye of

minstrel hath not witnessed. Yes, I have seen things not to be expressed, at least not here. Therefore I'll change the rule this night pursued, of saying what myself have seen and done. The fairy land in which I sojourned was fair Caledon; and there I had my living minstrel joys in high abundance. But I grieve to say, a fatal brawl placed all of us within the line to which the sword of vengeance extends its dreadful sway. Our group dispersed. The soul of melody was then no more! The sounds of harmony divine were hushed; all scattered on the winds of other lands, and other climes, to charm with wailing numbers. Southward I came, amid the border clans to trust my life, men lawless as myself. They once had saved me when a helpless orphan. Whom could I better trust? And I have found their generosity alone out-done by their own courage. For my adventures, let this sketch suffice. And though not of the fairyland, I will relate a tale, as pure, as wonderful and full of mystery, as if in other worlds I'd learned it. I had it from a simple peasant's mouth, an old grey hind upon the Sidley hills, who vouched its truth. With faltering tongue, and palpitating heart, for love, for life, and all the soul holds dear, I say my tale. O be my soul rapt to the estimate at which I hold the prize, and the divine and holy narrative.

Once on a time, in that sweet northern land called Otholine, the heathen Hongar landed, and o'er-ran city and dale. The rampart and the flood in vain withstood his might. Even to the base of the unconquered Grampians did he wend with fire and sword; and all who would not kneel, and sacrifice to his strange northern gods, he tortured to the death. Some few renounced the cross, for sordid life, and dread of unheard torments. Men were roasted, matrons impaled; and pure virginity was given up to the rude soldiery to be abused, or humbled as they termed it. Then were they decked with flowers and ornaments, led forth in pairs unto the horrid shrine, and sacrificed to Odin.

At that time there lived three beauteous sisters of the line of mighty kings. They were so passing fair, that all who saw them wondered, and all who wondered loved. Hongar and Hubba, these two heathen brothers, and princes of the Danes, heard of their fame, their beauty, and their excellencies of nature, and sent to seize them in their father's tower, that in the heights of Stormonth stood secure. The castle was surprised, the virgins seized, and carried to the camp. There to their dreadful trial were they brought, and bid to curse the sacred name they feared and worshipped; to

renounce the holy cross, and worship Odin, or give up their bodies to shame, to ignominy, and to death on Odin's hideous altar. Marley and Morna both kneeled and intreated, begged a little time to ponder on the dread alternative. But the young sprightly Lena, fairest she of Albyn's virgins, browed the invader's threat with dauntless eye: That eye whose liquid smile in love's sweet converse had been formed to beam.

'Thou savage heathen!' cried she, 'dost thou think to intimidate the royal maids of Caledon to thy most barbarous faith? Tyrant, thou art deceived. I dare thine ire. Thou may'st torment me; for I'm in thine hands, and thy heart ne'er knew pity. Thou may'st tear this tender fragile form with pincing irons. But my soul's purity thou never shall subdue by threat, by engine, or by flame. Thee and thy god I scorn – I curse you both. I lean upon the rock that will not yield; and put my trust in one whose mighty arm can crush thee and thy idol to an atom. I know he'll save me. He will save us all, if we but trust him without sinful dread. Here, underneath his bleeding cross, I kneel, and cast myself and my poor sisters here, upon his mercy. Here I make a vow to stand for him, and for his sacred truth, and for no other. Now, thou ruthless savage, here I defy thee. Do thy worst to us, and thou shalt see if Jesus or if Odin shall prevail, and who can best preserve their worshippers.'

The heathen brothers smiled; and Hongar said, 'How wildly sweet the little Christian looks! I make my choice to humble and prepare her for the base slaves of Odin's warlike halls. Go warriors, lock them up in donjon deep, until the hour of midnight, when the rites of Odin shall begin. Then will we send and bring them to the test; and all shall see whose God is most in might, and who must yield.'

In prison dark the virgins were immured, with sevenfold gates and sevenfold bars shut in. Soon as they were alone, the sisters twain, Marley and Morna, in fond tears embraced their youngest sister, lauded her high soul, and vowed with her to stand, with her to die, unsullied in the faith they had been taught.

Then did they kneel on the cold dungeon floor, and one by one offered their fervent prayers at mercy's footstool. But chiefly were their vows made to the Holy Virgin; for they hoped that she would save their pure virginity from sin's pollution. Never did prayers ascend up to heaven with greater fervency. And as the hour of midnight on them drew, they kneeled; and, side

by side, with lifted hands, and eyes turned toward heaven, sang aloud this holy simple hymn to their Redeemer.

HYMN TO THE REDEEMER

Son of the Virgin, hear us! hear us!
Son of the living God, be near us!
Thou who art man in form and feature,
Yet God of glory, and God of nature,
Thou who led'st the star of the East,
Yet helpless lay at a Virgin's breast;
Slept in the manger, and cried on the knee,
Yet rulest o'er Time and Eternity.
Pity thy creatures here kneeling in dust;
Pity the beings in thee that trust!
Thou who fed'st the hungry with bread,
And raised'st from the grave the mouldering dead;
Who walked'st on the waves of the rolling main,
Who cried'st to thy Father, and cried'st in vain;
Yet wept for the woes and the sins of man,
And prayed'st for them when thy life-blood ran;
With thy last breath who cried'st FORGIVE!
When bleeding and dying, that man might live!
Over death and the grave hast the victory won,
And now art enthron'd by the stars and the sun,
For thy name's glory, hear us, and come,
And show thy power over idols dumb.
O leave the abodes of glory and bliss,
The realms of heavenly happiness;
Come swifter than the gale of even
On thy lightning's wing, the chariot of heaven;
By the gates of light and the glowing sphere,
O come on thy errand of mercy here!
But Lord of glory we know not thee,
We know not what we say;
We cannot from thy presence be,

Nor from thine eye away:
For though on the right hand of God,
Thou art here in this dark and drear abode:
Beyond the moon and the starry way
Thou holdest thy Almighty sway,
Where spirits in floods of light are swimming,
And angels round thy throne are hymning;
Yet present with all who call on thee
In this world of wo and adversity.
Then, O, thou Son of the Virgin, hear us!
God of love and of life be near us!
Our hour of trial is at hand,
And without thy aid how shall we stand?
Our stains wash out, our sins forgive;
And before thee may our spirits live.
For thee and thy truth be our bosoms steeled:
O be our help, our stay, our shield:
Show thy dread power for mercy's sake,
For thy name, and thy glory, and all is at stake;
Bow down thy heavens, and rend them asunder,
And come in the cloud, in the flame, or the thunder.

The trumpets now were sounding, while the host arose from wine and wassail, to prepare the baleful sacrifice of Christian souls. The virgins heard, and trembled as they kneeled; and beauteous Lena raised her slender hands, and prayed, with many tears, that the Almighty would stretch out his right hand and close their eyes in everlasting sleep, to save them from self-slaughter, or the fate they dreaded more.

While yet the words were but in utterance, and ere the vow was vowed, they heard the gates unbarred one after one, and saw the lights glance through the lurid gloom. Each youthful heart turned, as it were, to stone; for well they weened the Danish soldiers came to bring them forth to shame and death. They kept their humble posture, with hands and eyes upraised, for they expected no pity or compassion save from heaven.

The inmost door upon its hinges turned, like thunder out of tune; and, lo! there entered – no heathen soldier – but a radiant form covered with light as

with a flowing robe. In his right hand he bore a golden rod, and in his left a lamp that shone as bright as the noon-day sun. A thousand thousand gems, from off his raiment, cast their dazzling lustre. Diamonds and rubies formed alternate stars, while all between was rayed and spangled o'er with ever-varying brightness. Round his head he wore a wreath of emeralds; these were set with never-fading green. They deemed he was the great high priest of Odin come to lead them to the sacrifice. But yet his look, so mild and so benign, raised half a hope within their breasts of pity and regard. They were about to plead; but ere a sound breathed from their lips, the stranger beckoned them to silence. Then, in mild and courteous strain, in their own tongue, he thus accosted them:

'To ONE already have your vows been framed; and would you bow to another? You have pleaded to heaven's high King; and would you plead to man? Rise up, and follow me.' The virgins rose; they had not power to stay – and followed him, alas! they knew not whither. They had no voice to question or complain. Door after door they passed; gate after gate; and still their guide touching them with his golden rod, they closed in jangling fury. Onward still they moved, and met the heathen bands, led by their chiefs, Hongar and Hubba. They were drunk with wine; and loudly did they halloo when they saw their prey escaped, and walking on the street all beauteous and serene. Closing around the fugitives, and jabbering uncouth terms and words obscene, the chiefs opened their arms to seize the helpless three. Just then their guide turned round unmoved, and waving his bright rod, the heathens staggered, uttered mumbling sounds, and, trying vainly to support themselves, reeling they sunk enfeebled to the earth, where all as still and motionless they lay as piles of lifeless corpses. How the virgins wondered at what they saw! and fearless now they followed their bright leader. Next they met the priests of Odin, in their wild attire, marching in grand procession to the scene of mighty sacrifice. Aloft they bore their hideous giant idol; by his sides his loathsome consort and his monster son, Freya and Thor, while all their followers sung this choral hymn in loud and warlike strains:

HYMN TO ODIN

I

He comes! he comes!
Great Odin comes!
Who can rise or stand before him?
The god of the bloody field,
The sword, and the ruddy shield;
The god of the Danes, let all adore him.

II

Wake the glad measure to
The goddess of pleasure too,
Who fills every hero with joy and with love!
And hail to dread Thor,
Great son of great sire,
The quaffer of gore,
And the dweller in fire:
The god of the sun, and the lightnings above.

III

Prepare! prepare!
The feat prepare,
Since mighty Thor our guest shall be:
Three times three,
And three times three,
This day shall bleed for repast to thee!

IV

Strike the light,
Make the flame burn bright,
Since Freya is here who gives delight!
Three times three,
And nine times nine,
This day shall bleed on altar of thine.

V

Shout and sing,
Till the mountains ring!

The father of men, and of gods the king!
See him advance
With sword and lance;
Billows of life-blood, heroes, bring!

VI

God of Alhallah's dome!
God of the warrior's home!
Who can withstand thee in earth or heaven?
Bring to his altar then,
Of Christian dames and men,
Nine times nine, and seven times seven.

VII

Bend to your place of birth,
Children of sordid earth;
The gods of battles your homage disdains.
Who dare oppose him?
Christian or Moslem?
Who is like Odin, the god of the Danes?

The maids and their angelic guide went on following the cross; and as they went, they sung in sweet and humble aspirations the song of the Lamb. They met the gorgeous files. Fair met with fair. The hideous idols sat an hundred cubits high; whereas the cross a maiden's hand upbore. But when they met, the proud and mighty peal, swelling from Odin's worshippers, was hushed as with a sob. The hills rang with the sound; and the o'erburdened air bore the last knell up to the skies. It quavered through the spheres, and died in distance, to be heard no more, while nought but the sweet notes the virgins sung rose on the paths of night. The motely mass of heathens stood amazed, and as they stood they listened and they quaked. The words were these at which they paused, and which the virgins sung:

Silence the blasphemers thee that defy,
Strike down the mighty, Son of the Most High;
Rise in thy power, that the heathen may see,

What dust are their gods and their glory to thee;
Raise thy right hand, and in pieces them shiver,
That to the true God may the praise be for ever.

At every line the bearers and their gods trembled the more, and as the last notes closed, the mighty Odin toppled from his throne, and crashed amid his powerless worshippers. His wooden spouse and son fell with the sire of Gods and men, and in a thousand pieces their gilded frames were dashed. Confusion reigned. The host fled in dismay; but Odin's priests sunk down in low prostration, groaning and howling for the fall of Odin – the shield and glory of the Danish host.

From out this wild confusion the bright guide conducted the three virgins to a cave close by the river's brink, and charged them hide until the wrath of the enraged foe should be abated. 'Here,' said he, 'you are in perfect safety. No one living knows of this retreat. Here sleep and take your rest. May angels watch around your flinty couch. Farewell, I must begone on the employ assigned me by your father and by mine.' He left the lamp and went his way. Forthwith they kneeled in prayer, thanking their Saviour for their great deliverance, then laid them down to rest. They kissed the cross, and folded closely in each other's arms, cheek leaning unto cheek, with holy hymns they sung themselves asleep.

Great was the rage among the Danish chiefs, and wide the search for these presumptuous and bold aggressors. The host was all discouraged and amazed, and nought but terror reigned. Earldoms were offered for the audacious maids, dead or alive. But nor alive nor dead could they be found, either by friend or foe. O dreadful were the execrations uttered by the Danes. They called them demons, witches, and the worst of all incendiaries. Well they might. The terror of their arms was broken. Great was the rejoicing mid the hills and glens of Albyn, but the eastern vallies groaned beneath the fury of the savage Dane, and Christian blood was shed on every cross.

The virgins waked at morn, and still the lamp sent forth its feeble glimmer through the cave. The day-beam through the crevice of the rock streamed in and mixed with it. The virgins strove to rise, to speak – to sing a morning hymn. But all their limbs were cold, and their tongues clove fast to their thirsty palates. Lena, first of all the three, upraised her pallid form,

and on the lamp turning her drowsy eye, there did it settle, closed, and oped again, but still with faded and uncertain light, as if the mind were lacking. Long she sat, half raised in this uneasy torpid state – this struggle 'twixt oblivion and life. Oft she assayed her sisters to awake, by naming them; but still as oft the names died in a whisper. By degrees her mind dawned into recollection, as the moon breaks o'er the sullen twilight. Then the wonders, that she had seen o'ernight, aroused her soul to all its wonted energy. She kneeled, and thanked her Maker for the great deliverance to them vouchsafed. And when her sisters woke, they woke to join her in a heavenly song.

'What ails our sister? Here we are in safety. Why does our dear beloved not rest in peace? The night is not far spent: the dawn of morn is yet far distant. O dear Lena sleep. Sleep on, and take your rest. The morning sun is yet beneath the deep. Our limbs are cold; our eyes are heavy; yet we cannot rise, for we are weary and not half awake.'

'Wake, my beloved sisters. It is time. The noon is at its height. See how the sun peeps through the granite cliffs, and on the stream sheds ray of trembling silver. Let us rise and talk of all the wonders we have seen.'

Long they conversed in tears of gratitude, still peeping from their cavern, lest the Dane again should find and drag them to the altar. Sore were they pressed by hunger. From the stream they drank abundantly with thankful hearts. But food for many a day and many a night they scarce had tasted, and they longed for it with more than ordinary longing. Night approached; and there they sat, not knowing what to do, a prey to gnawing hunger. At the last, young Lena said, 'I cannot ween that heaven hath wrought a miracle for our relief, and for no higher purpose than that we should be left to die of hunger in this dark and hideous den. Again I'll put my life into its hand, and go into the city after twilight in search of bread; and if I die I die: Heaven's will be done.' Her sisters looked at her, and blessed her in the holy Virgin's name. They could not bid her go where danger waited, so great, so imminent; and yet they felt they could not press her stay. With cautious eye, and with enfeebled step, trembling she sought the city gate. But when, afar, she saw by torchlight porters striding to and fro, with glittering lances of enormous length, and ponderous battle axes, her heart failed, and she drew back. But then she thought again of those she left behind, and all the throes of perishing with hunger, and resolved to risk all

hazards. The huge gate stood open, and strangers went and came. ‘I’ll join,’ thought she, ‘this straggling crew, and enter among them; they speak my native tongue. Ah! they must be a band of traitorous base renegades, that have renounced the cross and joined the Dane; else wherefore free to go and come and trade? I’m all unsafe with such.’ The strangers eyed her with most curious and piercing looks, and whispered as they went. They seemed afraid, and shunned her by the way, as they who shun a being infected by the pestilence, or spirit from the dead. No one addressed a word to her, but hurried to the gate.

She came alone, for feeble was her step, and her breast palpitating as with throb of burning fever, hopeless of admission.

The porters stared with wide extended gaze, and eyes protruding; but no word they spoke, nor crossed their lances. Straight she entered in. ‘What can this mean?’ thought she; ‘There is a change since yester-even that it passes thought to comprehend. These keepers are not Danes; I heard them speak in Albyn’s ancient tongue; and yet methinks they wear the Danish garb. How’s this? that I am free to come and go, as in my childhood, when the land was free?’

She passed the sacred fane, and there beheld crowds entering in; but fast she sped away, weening they went to Odin’s cursed rites.

She went to those that sold, and asked for bread. The woman stared at her with silent gaze. She asked again, and straight the huckster fled in floundering haste. Poor Lena stood amazed. ‘How’s this?’ said she, ‘where’er I show my face the people shun me. Here I shall remain, for I am faint with hunger, till I taste some of these cakes, which I can well repay.’

She stood not long until she was accosted by holy bedesman, who, with cautious step, and looks of terror, entered, fast repeating his *Ave Maria*. ‘In the Virgin’s name,’ cried he, ‘and under sanction of this cross, I charge thee tell who or from whence thou art.’

The virgin kneeled, and kissed the holy symbol, but waived direct reply. ‘I lack some bread to give to those that famish, and I’ll pay for that which I receive,’ was her reply.

‘Then ’tis the bread of life that thou dost lack; man’s natural food I fear thou can’st not use, for thou art not a being of this world, but savour’st of the grave. Thy robes are mouldy, and fall from off thy frame? Thy lips are parched and colourless. These eyes have not the light of human life. Thou

ominous visitant, declare from whence thou art, and on what mission thou com'st to this devoted wasted land?'

Lena looked up. The holy father's face to her appeared familiar. But how great the change since last she saw it. 'Father Brand, dost thou not know me?' was her home reply.

With blenching cheek and with unstable eye the father gazed, and, faultering, stammered forth, 'No. Jesu Maria, be thy servant's shield! Yes. Now I know thee. Art thou not the spirit of the hapless Ellamere, who was put down within our convent for a wilful breach of its most sacred law? Avaunt! Begone! Nor come thou here t' accuse those that grieved for thee, while they executed just vengeance on thy life. Injurious ghost! Thy curses have fallen heavy on our heads, and brought the wrath of heaven upon our land in tenfold measure. In the Saviour's name, whose delegate I am, I charge thee hence unto thy resting-place – to that award that heaven's strict justice hath ordained for thee; and come not, with that pale and withering look, more curses and more judgments to pronounce.'

'Reach me thine hand,' said she, and held hers forth, meaning to work conviction on his mind that she was flesh and blood. Her arm was wan as death itself, emaciated and withered, and furred with lines, livid and colourless, as by corrodent vapours of the grave. The monk withdrew his hand within his frock, shook his grey locks, and, with slow palsied step, moved backward till the threshold stone he gained; then turned and fled amain. The household dame fled also from her inner door, from which she peered and listened, and the wondering virgin again was left alone. She waited there in wild and dumb incertitude a space; then took some bread, some fruits, and baken meat, laid some money down as an equivalent, and went away to seek her dark retreat.

But as she passed the fane, with wary step she ventured to the porch, and marvelling, heard the whole assembly, joined in rapt devotion, praising the name of Jesus. Close she stood, and, darkling as it was, joined in the choir so much beloved. But all the wonders she so late had seen yielded to this. In one short night, one strange eventful night, such things were done as human intellect, with all its cunning, could not calculate.

She passed the gate. The gaping sentinels stood, as they did before, immoveable, each casting sidelong glances unto his mate, to note who first should fly or call the word. She beckoned them as with intent to speak; but

in one moment porters, spears, and axes scattered and vanished in the darksome shade.

Reaching the cave, she found the lamp gone out that their mysterious deliverer had left them over night. First she regaled her sisters' hearts with the miraculous tidings that all the people worshipped Jesus' name without dismay or molestation, who, but the night before, not for their lives durst have acknowledged him: That all seemed free to go and come, and pray to whom they listed. The tale seemed a romance – a dream of wild delirium. The Danes could not be banished in a night, and all the land cleared of the vile idolatry of Odin. They disbelieved the whole, as well they might, but held their peace, dreading their sister's mind mazed in derangement. Still, as she went on, saying that all whom she had met or seen supposed her one arisen from the dead, or ghost of some departed criminal, strangled for breach of a monastic vow, then did they grasp each other's hands, and weep for their dear sister's sad mishap. They deemed her mad as raving whirlwind, or the music of mountain cataract. Yet she had brought them food of various sorts, which in the dark she gave them; and they fed, or strove to feed – but small indeed the portion they devoured.

'How's this,' cried Morna, 'that my little cake grows ne'er the less? Can it be so that we are truly spirits – ghosts of the three maids that overthrew the Danish god last night? I hunger and I thirst, 'tis true. Tell me, Can spirits drink the element of water? Certes they may. But then, how did we die, or when? for I cannot remember me of passing death's hideous and dreary bourn, though something of a weary painful dream hangs round my heart.'

This vague disjointed speech, the wayward vision of distemperature, struck the two others motionless, and set them on cogitations wandering and wild as meteors o'er a dreary wilderness. The thought of being in a new existence, with all its unknown trials, powers, and limits, their struggling minds essayed in vain to grasp.

Reason returned, but as a step-mother returns to frenzied orphan's dying bed. They felt each other's pulses. There was life – corporeal life; but still there was a change, which no one chose to mention – yet a change quite unaccountable for one night's sleep to have effected. From their cavern's porch they viewed the stars of heaven. They were the same as they were wont. They saw the golden wain, the polar plough tilling his ample field with slow unwearied furrow, and the sisters – the seven lovely sisters of the

sky, arching their gorgeous path. Far to the east they spied a star beloved, which in their childhood they oft had watched, and named the ‘tiger’s eye,’ changing its vivid colours as of yore. And then they wept to think of former days of innocence and joy. And thus in tears, clasped in each other’s arms, they laid them down their mazed and oppressed spirits to compose.

While thus they lay, romantic Morna said: ‘My sisters, it is evident to all that some great change has happed to us last night. We are not what we were. What can it be but change from one existence to another? A mortal creature cannot touch or feel a disembodied spirit; but we know not how spirits feel each other. Sure as life and death hold opposition in this world, from the one into the other we have passed. I feel it in my being. So do you, though unacknowledged. Let us rise and walk as spirits do by night, and we shall see the change in us, not over a whole land in one short night. Come, let us roam abroad. I feel a restlessness – a strong desire to flit from place to place – perchance to fly between the mountain and the cloud, and view the abodes of those we love.’

This wild romance waked in the virgins’ hearts an energy between despair and madness. All extremes erratic and unnatural, on the minds of females, act like the infection of virulent disease. Up they arose, and, stepping from their cavern, took their way along the river’s brink. Midnight was past. The tiger’s eye had climbed the marble path that branches through the heaven, and goggled forth, now red, now blue, now purple and now green, down from his splendid ceiling far on high. ’Twas like a changeful spirit. In the east the hues of morning rose in towering streaks, as if the Almighty had caused light to grow like cedars from the summits of the hills. It was a scene for spirits! There were three abroad that morn before the twilight rose – three creatures spiritual, yet made of flesh! First they espied an aged fisherman, who passed without regard. Then did they deem they were invisible, and wilder still their fancies worked. The suburbs now they gained of the resplendent ancient Otholine, the emporium of the east, and hand in hand, with hurried, but enfeebled step, they trode its lanes and alleys. Those who saw them said their motions were erratic, like the gait of beings overcome with wine, or creatures learning to walk for the first time on earth. The early matron, and the twilight groom, fled with hysteric cries at their approach. The gates were left a-jar, the streets a waste: porter and sentinel joined in the flight, and nought but terror and confusion reigned.

The virgin sisters wist not what to do, or what to dread. Within the convent's porch, they halted, turned, and gazed on one another, and wondered what they were, that nature thus shuddered at their approach, and held aloof. Three creatures spiritual yet made of flesh, belonging not to heaven nor earth! but shunned by the inhabitants of both. Just then, while standing in despondency, they heard the grey cock crow; the eldritch clarion note chilled every heart, and twanged on every nerve.

'That is our warning call,' wild Morna said: 'My sisters now we must hence and begone: that is the roll-call of the murdering spirits. We shall be missed at matins. To your homes! your damp and mouldering homes, ye ghastly shades! The daylight will dissolve you! Does that voice not say so?'

'Hush thee, gentle Morna! drive us not to distraction. Here we'll wait until the convent matin; then we'll ask the holy prioress what things we are. What say you, gentle sisters? can we live outcasts on earth in such incertitude? Our father's towers are distant. We can glide, like passing shades with slow and feeble motion, but nothing more; – spirits can sail the air in skiff of mist or on the breeze's wing. Such powers we have not; and to journey there we lack ability. Here then we stay until we are resolved what strange events have happened to us, to our native land, and church, of late so grievously oppressed.'

'Yes, here we'll stay. Come, rouse the porteress! For see the sun tips the far hills with gold, and we shall melt before his tepid ray, all gentle as it is at early morn! My frame is like a mildew. The hoar frost of death hath fallen on it. Oh, for the guide – the angelic youth that left us yester-eve. Ho! daughters of the Cross! If any here hath 'scaped the murderous Dane, come forth and welcome the conquerors of Odin. Ho! within! Wake ere the sun upbraids you. He is up, on service to his Maker, yet you sleep. I say, wake.'

'Who calls? What are you there?'

'We know not what we are. For that we come, to see if any here can us resolve. But two short nights ago, we were three maids of royal lineage. Thou stern porteress, come forth and look on us. Canst thou not tell what we are made of? Why stand'st thou aloof?'

'Speak calmly, sister Morna. See she trembles and dares not answer. Gentle dame, we pray admission to your lady prioress, for sake of him who died upon the cross, whose name we worship.' Straight she vanished upon her fearful mission, glad to 'scape from such a colloquy. Soon then arrived

the aged prioress, who them approached with dauntless countenance, and, unappalled, asked of their errand. ‘Venerable dame, dost thou not know, or hast thou never heard of the three maids of Stormont, who of late, led by a heavenly messenger, o’erthrew the god of Denmark, and upheld the cross triumphant o’er the breasts of prostrate heathens?’

‘Ay, I have heard of them; and often joined in prayer and thanksgiving for the deliverance wrought by these royal virgins. That was a conquest that roused the spirit of the Christian to deeds of more than mortal energy, and humbled the proud confidence the Dane placed in his idols. Ay, that was a conquest shall cloud the brow of the idolater while the world stands! But what was it you spoke of yester-eve? Either you are deranged, or shallow poor impostors: for that time hath long gone past, and the three wondrous maids were in the sight, and from the middle of that mighty host translated into heaven. Unless you came from thence on sacred mission, and bringest evidence of identity by further miracle, better you had keep silence and depart.’

‘We are those maids, the maids of Stormont, nieces to the king; and we require of you lodging and fair protection, till we prove our lineage. There is something passing strange hath happened to us. But what the circumstance, or how accordant with the works of God, is far beyond the fathom and the height of our capacity. We are the maids of Stormont. To that truth we will make oath upon the holy cross.’

The prioress crossed herself, commended her to heaven, and, with deep awe and dire astonishment, admitted them. She gazed upon them: their fair cheeks were pale, and their benignant eyes looked through a haze that was not earthly; it was like the blue mists of the dawning. All their robes were of the fashion of a former day; and they were damp and mouldy, falling piecemeal from off their bodies with their rottenness.

‘I dread to question you, mysterious things. That you are earthly forms, I see and feel. Whence are you? In what dreary unknown clime have you been sojourning? Or are you risen from out your graves? If you have truth in you, and power to tell it, pray resolve me this; for I am lost in wonder.’

‘What we are we know not. For that purpose we came hither, that you might tell us. All we know is this: Last night but one we were the maids of Stormont, doomed to a dreadful fate. An heavenly one came to our rescue; led us through the gates of iron and of brass. Still as we went, we

conquered. Ranks of proud idolaters fell prostrate in the dust; and the great god, the mighty Odin, was o'erthrown, and dashed into a thousand pieces. Straight our blessed guide conducted us into a lonely cave close by the river's brink, and bade us sleep and take our rest until the day should dawn and shadows fly away. We slept, and yester-morn, when we awoke, the lamp our guide had left still feebly burned. Impelled by hunger, from our cave we ventured. All people fly from us; the Danes are gone; the name of Christ is mentioned. Nought we see and nought we hear is comprehensible.'

'A miracle! a mighty miracle! Within that secret cavern you have slept for days and years, in quiet sweet repose, the lamp of heaven still burning over you, until the day hath dawned – such a day of grace as Scotland hath not seen. The heathen Dane, with all his hideous gods, was vanquished, but days of darkness and contention rose, until this time, when all the glorious rays of mercy and of grace have shed their influence on this benighted persecuted land; and you are waked to enjoy it. Let us go straight to the altar, and beneath the cross join in elated thanksgiving.'

The chancel door opened before the altar. When the three virgins entered in, and saw the figure on the cross, they cried aloud with one combined voice, ''Tis he, 'Tis he! What? Have these heathens dared to lay their impious hands on him? 'Tis he! 'Tis he! Our heavenly guide that saved us from the death. And have they slain him? Has the cursed Dane—'

'Hold, hold, for mercy's sake; you do not know the things you utter. What you look upon, hangs there to represent the death of him who died that man might live.'

'And is it so? Then be our lives sacred unto the service of him who laid his life down for our race, and sent his angel to deliver us, in his own likeness too; for this is he who came to us in great extremity, when we called on the name of our Redeemer in agony of soul.'

'Remain with me till our great festival. This miracle must be made known to all that trust in Jesus' name. Meanwhile I will cherish and comfort the beloved of heaven.'

The day arrived of the great festival, the anniversary of the overthrow of mighty Odin – that sublime event that broke the bands of iron and of steel, and threw the gates of superstition open to Albyn's Christian triumph. On that day the king's whole household, nobles of the realm, high dames and commons, abbots, monks, and mendicants, a motely and a countless

multitude, assembled early at the monastery of ancient Otholine, to render thanks for their deliverance. Masses were said; and holy hymns of praise ascended to the skies. With one accord, then all the grateful multitude agreed to canonize the three heroic virgins, who, with the aid of angels, had wrought out the Christian's triumph, the beloved of heaven, translated to the blest beatitude, where souls of saints and blessed martyrs dwell, and whose joint prayers might with the holy Virgin much avail.

A joyful clamour for the ordinance then spread around, so eager were the crowd to kneel and pay their humble adorations to the three maids, translated to the heavens with bodies like their own. Applauses rang; and from behind the altar was given forth a song divine, in which a thousand voices joined, till all were hushed at this ecstatic strain.

Hail to the happy three!
Vessels of sanctity!
Now honoured to stand
At the Virgin's right hand.
(Mater Dei!
Remember me!)
Remember us all, and send us for good,
Bone of our bone, and blood of our blood –.
Song of harp, and voice be dumb! –
The heaven is oped. They come, they come!

A bustle rose. The abbot on his knees sunk down and leaned upon the altarcloth, and only a few voices whispered round, 'They come, they come!' The congregation turned their eyes into the chancel, and beheld three virgins, all in robes of purest white, stand over against the altar. The loud choir was hushed, and every brow was forward bent in low obeisance: All believing these three beauteous flowers from paradise had come arrayed in robes of heaven, with angel forms that bloomed like winter roses newly oped, in high approval of the festival, and sacred honours to be paid to them.

The virgins beckoned, raised their flowing veils, and their right hands to heaven. 'Stay,' they cried, 'stay the solemnity, ere you profane the name and altar of the God of heaven. Here stand the three unworthy maids of

Stormont whom you would deify. Come nigh to us our father and our king, and ye chaste ministers of him we serve: Come nigh, and feel that we are mortal like yourselves, and stop the rite. Pay adoration to that Holy One who pitied us in misery extreme, and you in grievous bonds. There be your vows and worship paid, in which we three shall join. He hath indeed done wondrous things for us, works of amazement, which you all shall hear, and whoso heareth shall rejoice in heart.'

Then came they all unto their father's knee, kneeled and embraced him, while the good old earl shed tears of joy, and rendered thanks to heaven: their sovereign next, their former lovers, friends, and all they knew in that mixed multitude, they did embrace, that no remaining doubt might spring and spread to their identity. It was a joyful meeting, such a one as hath not been in any land for happiness and holy ecstacy. They lived beyond the years of women – but their lives were spent in acts of holiness, apart from grandeur's train. In curing of the sick, clothing the naked, ministering to all in want and wretchedness, and speaking peace unto poor wandering and benighted souls. Their evening of life was like the close of summer day, pure, placid, and serene – the twilight long, but when at last it closed, it was with such a heavenly glow, it gave pure prospect of a joyous day to come. Thus ends my legend; and, with all submission, I bow to your awards, and wait my doom.

CHAPTER 23

Garolde. Prick on good Markham. That galled jade of yours
Moves with a hedgehog's pace. Is this a time
To amble like a belle at tournament,
When life and death hang on our enterprize?
Mark. We've had long stages, Garolde;
We must take up. What miscreants have we here?

The Prioress

'Lo, have not I taken great delight in the words of thy mouth?' said the friar, 'for it is a legend of purity and holiness which thou hast told, and the words of truth are contained in it. Peradventure it may be an ancient allegory of our nation, in which manner of instruction the fathers of Christianity amongst us took great delight. But, whether it be truth, or whether it be fiction, the tendency is good; and behold, is it not so; do not I even thank thee for thy tale?'

'It is the most diffuse, extravagant, and silly legend that ever was invented by votary of a silly and inconsistent creed,' said the Master.

'I side wi' you, Master Michael Scott,' said Tam Craik; 'I think the tale is nought but a string of bombastical nonsense.'

'Excepting ane about fat flesh, I think I never heard the match o't,' said the laird of the Peatstacknowe; 'It brings me amind o' our host's dinner, that was a' show but nae substance.'

'If I foresee aught aright,' said the Master, 'of many a worse dinner shall I see thee partake, and enjoy the sight.'

'Was not that a beautiful and sublime tale, father?' said Delany: 'I could sit and listen to such divine legends for ever.' The poet's eyes shone with tears when he heard the maid he loved say these words to the friar apart, who answered and said unto her, 'Lo, there are many more sublime and more wonderful in thy little book; nevertheless the tale is good for instruction to those that are faithless and doubting.'

‘Alak! I fear I shall not live to learn and enjoy these. Do not you think, father, that we shall all perish in this miserable place,’ added Delany – ‘this horrible place of witchcraft and divination?’ Charlie Scott stepped forward when he overheard some of these words. ‘Eh? what was the lassie saying?’ said he. ‘Eh? I’ll tell ye what it is, hinney: I believe ye see things as they are. There’s naething but witchcraft gaun on here; and it is that, and that alone, that a’ our perils and mischances rise frae. Begging your pardon, father, I canna help thinking what I think, and seeing what I see. But, gude faith! we maun blaw lown till we win aff the tap o’ this bigging, if that ever be.’

‘My hand hath prevailed against his hand,’ said the friar, ‘and my master over his master; and had it not been for this miserable accident we should have had nothing to fear from his divinations, sublime and mighty as they are. What hath become of the mighty men of valour from the camp of our captain?’

‘O there’s nae mortal can tell,’ said Charlie: ‘It was not for naething that Dan and his lads ran off and left us without ever looking ower their shoulders. A’ witchcraft! a’ witchcraft! Ane may stand against muckle, but nae man can stand against that. I wish we were where sword and shield could aince mair stand us in stead. But this I’m sure o’ – Now that our situation is kend to our kinsman, it winna be lang before some aid appear. O if it wad but come afore we are driven to that last and warst of a’ shifts to keep in life.’

‘We canna live another day,’ said Tam: ‘I therefore propose that the maid and the boy try ilk ane their hand at a tale too, and stand their chances with the rest of us. Their lives are of less value, and their bodies very tender and delicate.’

Every one protested against Tam’s motion with abhorrence; and it was agreed that they would now appeal to the Master who had told the worst tale. Not that the unfortunate victim was to be immediately sacrificed, nor even till the very last extremity; but with that impatience natural to man, they longed to be put out of pain; every one having hopes that his own merits protected himself from danger. Every one also believed that judgment would be given against Tam, except he himself; and that, at all events, such an award would put an end to his disagreeable and endless exultations of voracious delight. They then went before the renowned

wizard, and desired him to give judgment who of them had related the worst and most inefficient tale, laying all prejudice with regard to creeds and testimonies aside.

He asked them if they referred the matter entirely to him, or if they wished to have each one a vote of their own? Tam said it was an understanding at first that each should have a vote, and, as he had made up his mind on the subject, he wished to give his. Charlie said it was a hard matter to vote away the life of a friend; and, for his part, he would rather appeal to the great Master altogether. But if any doubts should remain with any one of their host's impartiality, he thought it fairer that they should cast lots, and hazard all alike. The poet, who had heard the Master's disapprobation given pointedly of his tale, sided with Yardbire, and voted that it should be decided by lot. Gibbie, though quite convinced in his own mind that he had told the best story, yet having heard the *morality* of it doubted, and dreading on that score to have some voices against him, called also for a vote; for he said the referring the matter to the Master brought him in mind of the story of the fox sitting in judgment, and deciding against the lamb. The friar also said, 'Verily, I should give my voice for the judgment of the Master to stand decisive: But, lo! is it not apparent that his thoughts are not like the thoughts of other men? Neither is his mind governed by the motives of the rest of the children of men. I do therefore lift up my voice for the judgment that goeth by lot. I would, notwithstanding of all this, gladly hear what the Master would say.'

'I will be so far just that I shall give you your choice,' said Master Michael Scott: 'Nevertheless I can tell you, if there be any justice in the decision by lot, on whom the lot will fall.' A pause of breathless anxiety occurred, and every eye was fixed on the grim and stern visage of the great necromancer, over whose features there appeared to pass a gleam of wild delight. 'It will fall,' added he, 'on that man of fables and similitudes, who himself bears the similitude of a man, just as the lion's hide stuffed does the resemblance of a real one. How do you call that beautiful and amiable being with the nose that would split a drop of rain without being wet?'

'Most illustrious knight, and master of the arts of mystery,' said the friar – 'as this man is, so is his name; for he is called Jordan, after the great river that is in the east, which overfloweth its banks at certain seasons, and falls into the stagnant lake called the Dead Sea, whose waters are diseased. So

doth the matter of this our friend overflow, pass away, and is lost. But what sayest thou of the default of his story? Dost thou remember that it is not for the best story that we cast lots, but the worst?'

'Ay, that's weel said, good friar,' said Charlie; 'for, trifling as the laird's story was, I never heard ought sae queer, or that interested ane mair. If there be ony justice in lots, the laird's safe.'

'Your's was the best tale, gallant yeoman,' said the Master, 'and you may rest assured that you are safe. The dumb judge will not err, and there is one overlooks the judgment by lot, of whom few are aware. I say your's was the best tale.'

'Thank ye kindly, Master Michael Scott,' said Charlie; 'I'm feared ilk ane winna be o' your opinion.'

The friar then took from the side-pockets of his frock a few scraps of parchment, amounting to fifteen. Twelve of these he marked with a red cross, and three with a black one, to prevent all infernal interference; then rolling them closely up, he counted them all into his cowl before his companions, and, shaking them together, he caused every one to do the same. Then putting the cowl into the virgin's hand, they desired her to hold it until they drew forth their scraps one by one. She did so, while her bright eyes were drowned in tears, and each of the candidates put in his hand, selecting his lot.

'Let them be opened, one by one, before all these witnesses,' cried the Master; 'that no suspicions of foul play whatever may remain.'

The friar drew forth his without one muscle of his unyielding features being altered, and turning deliberately about, he opened it before them all. It was red. The friar bowed his head, and made the sign of the cross. Charlie thrust in his hand – pulled out a ticket – and tore it open, all in one moment, and with the same impatience that he fought in a battle. His was likewise red.

'Gude faith I'm aince ower the water,' said Charlie.

Tam put in his hand with a decision that would have done honour to a better man, the form of his mouth only being a little altered.

'Now, who will take me a bet of a three-year-old cout,' cried Gibbie, 'that the next shall turn out a black one?' and he grinned a ghastly smile, in anticipation of the wished event. Tam kept his hand within the cowl for a good while, as if groping which to select. At length he drew one forth; and

before he got it opened, Gibbie's long nose and his own had met above it, so eager was each of them to see what it contained. It was opened. Each of them raised up his face, and looked at the face of his opponent; but with what different expressions of countenance! The cross on the lot was red! Grief, dread, and disappointment were all apparent in the features of poor Jordan, while the exulting looks of his provoking neighbour were hardly to be endured.

'What think you o' that now, laird?' cried he. 'What does that bring you in mind o'? Eh? I say, wha's jugular vein swells highest now; or wha's shoulder-blade stands maist need o' clawing?'

This was rather more than Gibbie was disposed at that juncture to bear; and when Tam, as he concluded, put forth his forefinger to ascertain the thickness of fat on the laird's ribs, the latter struck him with such force on the wrist, that he rendered his arm powerless for a space. He put his hand to his sword, but could not grasp it; while Gibbie, seeing the motion, had his out in a twinkling; and if the staunch friar had not turned it aside, he would have had it through the heart of the deil's Tam in a second, which might have prevented the further drawing of lots for that present time, and thereby put an end to a very critical and disagreeable business. Gibbie was far from being a hot or passionate man; but whether his rage was a manoeuvre to put by the decision, or if he really was offended at being handled like a wedder for slaughter, the curate pretends not to guess. He however raged and fumed exceedingly, and tried again and again to wound Tam, while the rest were remonstrating with him; nor would he be pacified, until Tam's disabled arm by degrees regaining somewhat of its pristine nerve, he retreated back towards the battlement for sword-room, and dared the laird to the combat. Gibbie struggled hard; but finding that they were about to let him go, his wrath subsided a little; he put up his sword, and said the whole business reminded him of a story of the laird of Tweelsdon and his two brothers, which he assured them was a prime story, and begged permission to tell it. This was protested against with one voice until the business of the lots was decided, and then all were willing to hear it. 'Oh, the lots? that is quite true,' said Gibbie: 'I declare that business had gone out of my head. Let us see what casts up next.' There was a relaxation in every muscle of Gibbie's face as he put his hand into the cowl. But Gibbie's was a sort of a cross face. It did not grow long and sallow as most other men's faces do when

they are agitated. The jaws did not fall down, they closed up; so that his face grew a great deal shorter and broader. The eye-brows and the cheekbones met, and the nose and chin approached to a close vicinity. He drew forth the momentous scrap, and, with fumbling and paralytic hand, opened it before them. The cross was black. He dared not lift his eyes to any face there save to Delany's, and when he saw it covered with tears his looks again reverted that way. This lot it is true was not decisive, yet it placed Gibbie on ticklish ground; it having been agreed, that whoever should draw the two first black crosses, subjected himself to immolation, if the necessity of the case required it. The great Master and Tam were visibly well pleased with the wicked chance that had fallen to the laird. The motives of the former for this delight were quite a mystery to those who beheld it; as for Tam, he seemed determined to keep no more terms with poor Gibbie.

The poet also drew a red one; and then it was decreed, that the next round Gibbie should have his choice of the time, if he judged it any advantage either to be first or last. He seemed quite passive, and said it was all one to him, he should draw at any time they chose, and desired his friend Yardbire, as he termed him, to choose for him. Charlie said he deemed the first chance the best, as he had then four chances to be right, for one of being wrong; and it would be singular indeed if his hand fixed on a black cross again for a time or two, when more of them might be on an equal footing.

Gibbie accordingly turned round, and drew out one more of the ominous scraps, opening it under the eyes of all the circle with rather a hopeful look. 'If the deil be nae in the cowl, I shall hae a red ane this time,' said he, as he unrolled it; but as soon as the head of the cross appeared the ticket fell from his hand; and, as the friar expressed it, there was no more strength remaining in him. 'Verily, my son, thy fate is decided,' said the latter worthy; 'and that in a wonderful and arbitrary manner. As the Master said, so hath it come to pass, although to judge of any thing having been done unfairly is impossible.'

'It is absolute nonsense to talk of aught being done fairly in this place,' said Charlie Scott: 'There's naething but witchcraft gaun. I tell ye a' things here are done by witchery an' the black arts; and after what I heard the king of a' warlocks say, that the lot wad fa' in this way, I winna believe that honest Gibbie has gotten fair play for his life.'

‘If you would try it an hundred times over,’ said the Master, ‘you would see it turn out in the same way. Did not I say to you that there was a power presided over the decision by lot, which you neither know nor comprehend. Man of metaphors and old wives’ fables, where art thou now?’

‘Keep a gude heart, Peatstacknowe,’ said Charlie; ‘perhaps things may not come to the worst. I have great dependence on Dan Chisholm and the warden’s good men. I wonder they have not appeared wi’ proper mattocks, or ladders, by this time o’ the morning.’

‘If they should,’ said the Master, ‘and if we were all set at liberty this minute, he shall remain my bondsman, in place of these two and him of whom your arts have bereaved me. Remember to what you agreed formerly, of which I now remind you.’

‘I think that is but fair,’ said the poet.

‘I do not know, gentlemen, what you call fair or foul,’ said Gibbie: ‘I think there is little that is favourable going for somebody. Of the two evils, I judge the last the worst. I appeal to my captain the Warden.’ Gibbie’s looks were so rueful and pitiable when he said this, that no one had the heart to remonstrate farther with him on the justice or injustice of his doom. The Master and Tam enjoyed his plight exceedingly; the poet rejoiced in it, as it tended to free Delany from a vile servitude; and the friar also was glad of the release of the darling of his younger years, the grand-daughter of Galli the scribe. Charlie and Delany were the only two that appeared to suffer on account of the laird’s dismal prospects, and their feelings were nearly as acute as his own. Stories and all sorts of amusements were now discontinued. A damp was thrown over these by the dismal gloom on the laird’s countenance, and the congenial feelings of others on his account. The night had passed over without any more visitants from the infernal regions; the day had arisen in the midst of heaviness and gloom; and every eye was turned towards the mill, in the expectation of seeing the approach of Dan and his companions.

CHAPTER 24

Ask me not whence I am;
My vesture speaks mine office.

Female Parliamenters, a MS Com.

After the frightsome encounter at the mill, with ‘the masterless dog and his bow-wow-wow,’ Dan and his companions spent a sleepless night, not without several alarms and breathless listenings on the occurrence of any noise without. Few were the nightly journies on the banks of the Ettrick in those days, and few the midnight noises that occurred, save from the wild beasts of the forest. There were no wooer lads straying at that still and silent hour, to call up their sweethearts for an hour’s kind conversation. Save when the English marauders were abroad, all was quietness by hamlet and steading. The land was the abode of the genii of the woods, the rocks, and the rivers; and of this the inhabitants were well aware, and kept within locked doors, whose lintels were made of the mountain ash, and nightly sprinkled with holy water. Cradle and bed were also fenced with cross, book, and bead; for the inmates knew that in no other way could they be safe, or rest in peace. They knew that their green and solitary glens were the nightly haunts of the fairies, and that they held their sports and amorous revels in the retiring dells by the light of the moon. The mermaid sung her sweet and alluring strains by the shores of the mountain lake, and the kelpie sat moping and dripping by his frightsome pool, or the boiling caldron at the foot of the cataract. The fleeting wraiths hovered round the dwellings of those who were soon to die, and the stalking ghost perambulated the walks of him that was lately living, or took up his nightly stand over the bones of the unhouseholded or murdered dead. In such a country, and among such sojourners, who durst walk by night?

But these were the natural residenters in the wilds of the woodland, the aboriginal inhabitants of the country; and however inimical their ways

might be to the ways of men, the latter laid their account with them. There were defences to be had against them from holy church, which was a great comfort. But ever since Master Michael Scott came from the colleges abroad to reside at the castle of Aikwood, the nature of demonology in the forest glades was altogether changed, and a full torrent of necromancy, or, as Charlie Scott better expressed it, of *witchcraft*, deluged the country all over – an art of the most malignant and appalling kind, against which no fence yet discovered could prevail. How different, indeed, became the situation of the lonely hind. Formerly he only heard at a distance on moonlight eves the bridle bells of the fairy troopers, which haply caused him to haste homeward. But when the door was barred and fenced, he sat safe in the middle of his family circle as they closed round the hearth, and talked of the pranks of *the gude neybouris*. When the speats descended, and floods roared and foamed from bank to brae, then would they perceive the malevolent kelpie rolling and tumbling down the torrent like a drowning cow, or mountain stag, to allure the hungry peasant into certain destruction. But, aware of the danger, he only kept the farther aloof, quaking at the tremendous experiment made by the spirit of the waters. It was in vain that the mermaid sung the sweetest strains that ever breathed over the evening lake, or sunk and rose again, spreading her hands for assistance, like a drowning maiden, at the bottom of the abrupt cliff washed by the waves – he *would not* be allured to her embraces.

But what could he do now? His daughters were turned into roes and hares, to be hunted down for sport to the Master. The old wives of the hamlet were saddled and bridled by night, and urged with whip and spur over whole realms. The cows were deprived of their milk – the hinds cast their young, and no domestic cat in the whole district could be kept alive for one year. That infernal system of witchcraft then began, which the stake and the gibbet could scarcely eradicate in a whole century. It had at this time begun to spread all around Aikwood; but of these things our Border troopers were not altogether aware. They dreaded the spirits of the old school, the devil in particular; but of the new prevailing system of metamorphoses they had no comprehension.

Dan and three chosen companions, mounting their horses by the break of day, rode straight for the abbey of Melrose, to lodge their complaint against the great enemy of mankind, and request assistance from the holy fathers in

rescuing their friends out of his hands. They reached Darnick-burn before the rising of the sun; and just as they passed by a small deep-wooded dell, they espied four horsemen approaching them, who, from their robes and riding appurtenances, appeared to belong to the abbey, and to rank high among its dignitaries. They were all mounted on black steeds, clothed in dark flowing robes that were fringed with costly fringes, and they had caps on their heads that were horned like the new moon. The foremost, in particular, had a formidable and majestic mitre on his head, that seemed all glancing with gems, every one of which was either black, or a certain dazzling red of the colour of flame.

Dan doffed his helmet to this dignified and commanding personage, but he deigned not either to return our yeoman's low bow, that brought his face in contact with the mane of his steed, or once to cross his hand on his brow in token of accepting the submission proffered. He, however, reined up his black steed, and sat upright on his saddle, as if in the act of listening what this bold and blunt trooper had to say.

'Begging pardon of your grand and sublime reverence,' said Dan, 'I presume, from your lofty and priest-like demeanour, habiliments, and goodly steed, and also from that twa-horned helmet on your head, that you are the very chap I want. I beg your pardon I canna keep up my style to suit your dignity. But are nae ye Father Lawrence, the great primate, that acts as a kind o' king or captain ower a' the holy men of Scotland, and has haudding in that abbey down by there?'

'Certes I am Father Lawrence. Dost thou doubt it?'

'No, no; what for should I doubt it when your worship has said it? An we dinna find truth aneath the mitre and the gown, where are we to look for it?'

The sublime abbot shook his head as if in scorn and derision of the apothegm, and sat still upright on his steed, with his face turned away. Dan looked round to his companions with a meaning look, as much as to say, 'What does the body mean?' But seeing that he sat still in the act of listening, he proceeded.

'Worthy Sir Priest, ye ken our captain, Sir Ringan Redhough, warden of the Border. He has helpit weel to feather your nest, ye ken.'

'He has. There is no one can dispute it,' said the abbot, nodding assent.

'Then ye'll no be averse, surely, to the lending o' him and his a helping hand in your ain way.'

The priest nodded assent.

‘Weel, ye see, Sir Priest, there is a kinsman of our master’s lives up by here at Aikwood, a rank warlock, and master o’ the arts of witchcraft and divination. He is in compact wi’ the deil, and can do things far ayont the power o’ mortal man. What do ye think, Sir Priest? he can actually turn a man into a dog, and an auld wife into a hare; a mouse into a man, and a cat into a good glyde-aver. And mair than that, Sir, he can raise storms and tempests in the air; can gar the rivers rin upward, and the trees grow down. He can shake the solid yird; and, look ye, Sir, he can cleave a great mountain into three, and lift the divisions up like as mony gowpens o’ sand.’

The stern abbot gave a glance up to the three new hills of Eildon, that towered majestically over their heads; but it seemed rather a look of exultation than one either of wonder or regret.

‘Weel, Sir, disna our captain send a few chosen friends, a wheen queer devils to be sure, on a message of good friendship to this auld warlock Master Michael Scott, merely with a request to read him some trivial weird. And what does the auld knave, but pricks them a’ up on the top o’ his castle, wi’ a lockit iron-door aneath them, and there has keepit them in confinement till they are famishing of hunger, and I fear by this time they are feeding on ane another. And the warst o’t ava, Sir, is this, I wad break his bolts and his bars to atoms for him, but has nae he the deil standing sentry on the stair, spuing fire and brimstone on a’ that come near him in sic torrents that it is like the fa’ o’ the Grey-mare’s-tail. Now, maist reverend and worthy Sir, my errand and request to you is, that, for my master’s sake, and for his men’s sake, that are a’ good Christians, for ought that I ken to the contrary, you will lend us a lift wi’ book and bead, Ave Marias, and other powerful things, to drive away this auld sneckdrawing thief, the devil, and keep him away till I get my friends released; and I promise you, in my master’s name, high bounty and reward.’

‘Ha! is it so?’ said the abbot, in a hollow, tremulous voice. ‘Are my friend and fellow-soldier’s men detained in that guise? Come, my brethren, let us ride – let us fly to their release, and we shall see whose power can stand against our own. For Aikwood, ho!’

‘For Aikwood, ho!’ shouted Dan and his companions, as they took the rear of the four sable dignitaries; and striking the spurs into their steeds all

at the same time, they went off at their horses' utmost speed, but in a short time the four yeomen were distanced. The black steeds and their riders went at such a pace as warrior had never before witnessed. Up by the side of Hindly-burn they sped, with the most rapid velocity – over mire, over ditch, over ford, without stay or stumble. Dan and his companions posted on behind, sparing neither whip nor spur, for they were affronted that these gownsmen should display more energy in their master's cause, and the cause of his friends, than they should do themselves. But their horses floundered, and blew, and snorted, and puffed, and whisked their tails with a whistling sound, and still lagged farther and farther behind.

'Come, come, callants,' cried Dan to his companions, 'let us rein up. These bedesmen's horses are ower weel fed for our bog-trotting nags. They fly like the wind. Od, we may as weel try to ride wi' the devil.'

'Whisht, whisht,' said Will Martin; 'I dinna like to mak ower familiar wi' that name now-a-days. We never ken wha's hearing us in this country.'

They were nigh to the heights when these words passed, and the four black horsemen perceiving them to take it leisurely, they paused and wheeled about, and the majestic primate taking off his cornuted chaperon, waved it aloft, and called aloud, 'For shame, sluggish hinds! Why won't you speed, before the hour of prevention is lost? For Aikwood, ho, I say!' As he said these words, his black courser plunged and reared at a fearful rate; and, as our troopers thought, at one bolt sprung six or seven yards from the ground. The marks of that black horse's hoofs remain impressed in the sward to this day, and the spot is still called *The Abbot's Lee*. At least it had been so called when Isaac the curate wrote this history.

To keep clear of the wood that was full of thickets, they turned a little to the left, and pursued their course; and the ground becoming somewhat firmer, our yeomen pursued hard after them. But on coming over the steep brow of a little hill, the latter perceived a mountain lake of considerable extent that interrupted their path, and, to their utter astonishment, the four black horsemen going straight across it, at about the same rate that the eagle traverses the firmament. 'The loch is frozen and bears over,' said Dan: 'Let us follow them across.'

'The loch is frozen indeed,' said Will Martin, 'but, ony man may see, that ice winna bear a cat.'

‘Haud your tongue, you gouk,’ said Dan: ‘Do ye think the thing that bore them winna bear us?’ And as he spurred foremost down the steep, he took the lake at the broad side; but the ice offering no manner of resistance, horse and man were in one moment out of sight. The sable horsemen on the other side shouted with laughter, and called aloud to the troopers, ‘to venture on, and haste forward, for the ice was sufficiently strong.’

The bold trooper and his horse were extricated with some difficulty, and the monks testifying the utmost impatience he remounted, dripping as he was, and not being able to find the passage across the lake on the ice, he and his companions gallopped around the head of it. As he rode, the morning being frosty, he chanced to utter these words: ‘Heigh-ho, but I be a *cauld cheil!*’ Which words, says Isaac, gave the name to that lake and the hill about it to all future ages; and from those perilous days of witchcraft and divination, and the shocking incidents that befel to men, adds he, have a great many of the names of places all over our country had their origin.

The dark horsemen always paused until the troopers were near them, as if to encourage them on, but they never suffered them to join company. When they came over a ridge above old Lindean they were hard upon them, but lost sight of them for a short space on the height; and, coming on full speed, they arrived on the brink of a deep wooded dell, and to their utter astonishment saw the four gownsmen on the other side, riding deliberately along, and beckoning them forward.

‘I am sair mista’en,’ said Will Marton, ‘gin thae chaps hae nae gaen ower the cleugh at ae bound. An it warna for their habits I wad take them for something nouther good nor cannie.’

‘Haud your tongue, or else speak feasible things,’ said Dan; ‘Can the worthy Father Lawrence, and his chief priors and functionaries ever be suspected as warlocks, or men connected wi’ the devil and his arts? If sic were to be the case, we hae nae mair trust to put in aught on this earth. The dell maun be but a step across. Here is a good passable road; come, let us follow them.’

Dan led the way, and they dived into the dell by a narrow track, rather like a path for a wild goat than men and horses; however, by leaping, sliding, and pushing one another’s horses behind, they got to the bottom of the precipice, and perceiving a path on the other side, they expected to reach the western brink immediately. But in this they were mistaken; abrupt

rocks, and impenetrable thickets barred their progress on every side, and they found it impossible to extricate themselves without leaving their horses. They tried every quarter with the same success, and at the last attempted to ascend by the way they came; but that too they found impracticable, and all the while they heard the voices of their fellow travellers chiding their stay from above, and shaming them for their stupidity in taking the wrong path. At one time they heard them calling on them to come this way, here was an excellent outgate; and when the toiled yeomen stuck fairly still in that direction, they instantly heard other voices urging them to ascend by some other quarter. At other times they thought they heard restrained bursts of giggling laughter. After a great deal of exertion to no manner of purpose, they grew they neither knew what to do nor what they were doing, and at last were obliged to abandon their horses, and climb the ascent by hanging by the bushes and roots of trees. When they emerged from the deep hollow, they perceived eight black horsemen awaiting them instead of four; but as the country around Melrose and Dryburgh swarmed with members of the holy brotherhood of every distinction and rank, the troopers took no notice of it, thinking these were some of the head functionaries come to wait on their abbot. The latter chided our yeomen in sharp and resentful language for their utter stupidity in taking the wrong path, and regretted exceedingly the long delay their mistake had occasioned, his time he said being limited, as was also the time that his power prevailed in a more particular way over the powers of darkness. ‘For us to go alone,’ added he, ‘would signify nothing. The manual labour of breaking through the iron gates we cannot perform; therefore, unless you can keep up with us, we may return home by the way we came.’

‘I am truly grieved,’ said Dan, ‘at our misfortune. We have certainly been more forward than wise, and I fear have marred the fairest chance we will ever have for the deliverance of our friends. But I have a few fellow warriors at the mill who will accompany you for a word of your mouth. I beg that you will not think of returning, for the case brooks no delay. We have lost our horses, and can hardly reach the castle on foot before it be evening. I wot not what we shall do.’

‘Brethren, I am afraid I must request of you to lend these brave troopers your horses,’ said the abbot to the four last comers. ‘My esteem for the

doughty champion of my domains is such, that I would gladly do him a favour.'

'O thank you, thank you, kind sir; we are mair behadden to you than tongue can tell,' said Dan. The four new come brethren dismounted at their abbot's request; and, without taking a moment to hesitate, the four yeomen mounted their horses. The abbot Lawrence charged them to urge the steeds to their utmost speed. Away went the abbot and his three sable attendants, and away went the four troopers after them; but from the first moment that they started the latter lost sight of the ground, unless it was, as they thought, about a mile below their feet. The road seemed to be all one marble pavement, or sheet of solid alabaster; there was neither height nor hollow in it that they could distinguish; but the fire flew from the heels of the horses, and sparkled across the firmament like thousands of flying stars. The velocity at which they went was such, that the borderers could not draw their breath save by small broken gulps; but as they imagined they rode at such an immense distance from the ground, they kept firm by their seats for bare life, leaning forward with their eyes and their mouths wide open. Having never in all their lives rode on such a path, they were soon convinced that they could not be riding toward Aikwood, around which the roads were very different. They often attempted to speak to one another, but could not utter any thing farther than one short sound, for the swiftness with which they clove the atmosphere cut their voices short. At length Dan, perceiving his comrade, Will Martin, scouring close by his side, forced out the following sentence piecemeal:

'Where – the – devil – are we – gaun – now?'

'Straight – to – hell –. What – need – ye – speer?'

'The – lord – for – for – for – bid – Will Martin,' was the reply, which has since grown to a proverb.

On they flew, over hill, over dale, over rock and river, over town, tower, and steeple, as our yeomen deemed; but they might deem what they pleased, for they saw nothing except now and then the tails of the churchmen's gowns flapping in the air before them. However, they came to their goal sooner than they expected, and that in a way as singular as that by which they reached it.

The miller at Aikwood-mill had a whole hill of kiln-seeds, or shealings of oats, thrown out in a heap adjoining to the mill. Ere ever our yeomen knew

what they were doing from the time they mounted, they were all lying in this immense heap of kiln-seeds, perfectly dizzy and dumfoundered, and setting up their heads from among them with the same sort of staring stupid attempt at consideration as the heads of so many frogs which may be seen newly popped up out of a marsh. The bedesmen were a-head of them to the end of the course, and drew up by wheeling their horses round the kiln as if it had been a winning-post; but the yeomen's horses, in making the wheel, threw their riders, one by one, with a jerk over head and ears among the loose heap of seeds, and galloping off around the corner of the hill, they never saw another hair of their tails.

The miller came running out from his mill with his broad dusty bonnet; the smoky half-roasted kiln-man out from his logie; the mill-maidens came skipping from the meal-trough, as white as lilies; the rest of the warden's men, and the four sable dignitaries of the church came also, and all of them stood in a ring round our dismounted troops, some asking one question, some another, but all in loud fits of laughter. Their wits could not be rallied in an instant; and all that they could do or say was to blow the seeds out of their mouths, with which they were literally filled, and utter some indefinite sentences, such as, 'Rather briskish yauds these same!' 'May the like o' mine never be crossed by man again!' 'Hech! but they are the gear for the lang road!' 'What's become o' them? I wad like to take a right look o' them for aince.' 'Do ye want to look if they have mark o' mouth, Will? You may look at some o' these that came foremost then. Yours are aff wi' their tails on their rigging; there are some cheated if ever you see mair o' them.' Will Martin looked at the abbot's horse; but when he saw the glance of his eye, he would not have taken him by the jaws to have looked his mouth for all Christendom.

The four sable horsemen led the way, and all the yeomen followed on foot, bearing with them such mattocks as they had been able to procure about Selkirk that morning, and away they marched in a body to Aikwood castle. That was a blyth sight to our forlorn and starving prisoners; even Gibbie had some hopes of a release: but whenever Master Michael Scott got a near view of the four sable equestrians, he sunk into profound and gloomy silence, and every now and then his whole frame was observed to give a certain convulsed shake, or shudder, which cannot be described. The rest of the sufferers supposed it to proceed from his rooted aversion to holy and

devout men; but they were so intent on regaining their own liberty that they paid little attention to the manner in which he was affected. Father Lawrence bade the men proceed to work, and he would retire into an inner chamber and exercise himself so as to keep from them all sorts of interruption from spirits of whatever denomination, and he pledged himself for their protection. They thanked him, and hasted to execute their design; nor were they long in accomplishing it. By the help of huge scaling hammers they broke down a part of the narrow staircase, and actually set their friends at liberty. But the abbot enjoined them in nowise to depart, or to do any thing contrary to the desire of the mighty Master, while they remained in his premises, else he could not answer for the consequences. This our yeomen readily assented to, and undertook to prevail with their friends to acquiesce in the same measure.

As soon as the iron-door was forced, the abbot Lawrence sent one of his officers to desire Master Michael Scott to come and speak to him privately in the secret chamber. The wizard looked at the messenger as a sovereign does to a minister of whom he is afraid, or a master to a slave, who, he knows, would assassinate him if he could; nevertheless he rose and followed him to his superior. What passed between these two dignified characters it is needless here to relate, as the substance of the matter will appear in the sequel. But the Master returned into the great hall, where the warden's men were by that time all assembled, an altered man indeed. His countenance glanced with a sublime but infernal exultation. His eye shone with ten times the vigour of youthful animation. It was like a dying flame relumined, that flashes with more than pristine brightness; and the tones of his voice were like those of a conqueror on the field of battle. With this voice, and with this mien, he ordered the friar and his ward Delany instantly to quit the castle; and if an hour hence they were found on his domains, he would cause them to be hewed into so many pieces as there were hairs on their heads.

'Lo thy threats are unto me as the east wind,' said the friar: 'Yea as the wind that cometh from the desert, and puffeth up the vapours on the stagnant pools of water. If my companions in adversity go, then will I also go along with them. But if they remain, by the life of Pharaoh, so likewise will thy servant; and what hast thou more to say, thou man of Belial?'

The Master shook his grey locks and his dark silvery beard in derision; and Charlie Scott, whose confidence in his friend the friar was now unbounded, stepped up to back what he had said, and to protest against parting company. Dan, however, interfered hastily, and told them he was bound by a promise to the holy father, who had wrought their liberty, to do nothing adverse to the will of the Master, while they remained in his castle and on his domains; and therefore he begged they would comply without more words, and without delay. The friar then consented, much against Charlie's inclination; and taking Delany by the hand, he said: 'Lo I will even depart; but I will remain at the ford of Howden-burn until my friends arrive, for then am I from off the territory of this blasphemer and worker of all manner of iniquity. See that you tarry not at the wine, neither let your eyes behold strange women, that it may be well with you.' So the two went away, and did as they had said. The friar found his mule in good keeping, and he remained with the maid in a cottage at the fords of Howden-burn, to await the issue of this singular and unfortunate embassy.

'Now shall I have my will, and do that which seems meet to me,' said the Master, as he strode the hall with unrestrained energy. 'Did the dolt imagine he could, with his tricks of legerdemain, outdo me in the powers and mysteries of my art? No, that man is unborn! Let him go with his crosiers and his breviaries; I am Michael Scott once again!'

'It is needless to say ought here,' said Charlie Scott aside to his companions: 'Fock should ken weel what they say, and where they are saying it. But the truth is, that the friar was the greatest man o' the twa; and that auld birkie was right sair cowed in his presence. It is sair against my will that we hae been obliged, by your promise, Dan, to part wi' the gospel friar; for, d'ye ken, I feel amaist as the buckler were ta'en aff my arm, to want him as lang as I am here. What do you think the carl did, Dan? Come here, you and Will, and I'll tell you. When we came here, ye see, the master had a steward, a perfect hound o' hell, wha thought to guide us waur than dogs; and he crossed the friar unco sair, till at length he lost a' patience wi' him, and, lord sauf us! sent him up through the clouds in a flash o' fire; and there has never been mair o' him seen, but some wee bits o' fragments. I can tell you the loss o' sic a man as the friar, out o' sic a place as this, is a loss no easily made up.'

‘Have a little patience, brave Yardbire,’ said Dan: ‘We have the great and the grave abbot Lawrence in his place. He is our firm friend and our captain’s friend, and every thing will now be settled in the most amicable manner –.’

‘That holy father and his assistants are the only hope I hae,’ returned Charlie: ‘An it warna for their presence, I wadna stay another half hour in sic a place as this. Ye little ken what scenes we ha’e witnessed during the days and nights that we ha’e been here. However, as I had the charge of the embassage, I will gang and speak to the auld billy. He seems to be in a high key. Master Michael Scott; ye ken that yoursel’ and our auld friar, by your trials o’ skill in your terrible arts o’ witchcraft, brought about an accident that has kept us ower lang here, to the great trouble and inconveniency of our captain, your own brave kinsman. Now, since we are a’ at liberty again, we beseech you to give us our answer; and if you canna read the weird that he desires of you, why tell us sae at aince, and let us gang about our business.’

‘Gallant yeoman, your request shall be granted without loss of time,’ said the Master. ‘But it is the venerable father’s request that I should regale my kinsman’s people before dismissing them, to make some small return for the privations they have suffered. Be satisfied then to remain for a few hours, till you taste of my cheer; and in the meanwhile I will look into the book of fate, and not only tell you what your captain, Sir Ringan, ought to do, but I will show you demonstratively what he *must* do, if he would succeed in raising his name and his house above that of every Scottish baron.’

‘Thank ye, noble sir,’ said Charlie: ‘There shall never be another word about it. If we gain our errand sae satisfactorily at last, I’ll count a’ that we ha’e bidden weel wared.’

‘Noble and worthy Sir, you never yet have said who told the most efficient tale, and unto whom the maiden should belong,’ said the poet.

‘’Twas he, your captain there, who said the tale I most approved, and to him I award my right in the toy, the trifle you call maiden,’ returned the Master. ‘And it is well remembered, squire; amongst you, you deprived me of my steward, a man that could have accomplished a great deal – I therefore claim this worthy in his stead, as agreed; and glad may he be that he escapes so well.’

‘I fear I will be a bad cook, and an awkward valet,’ said Gibbie. ‘I was never very handy at ought that way. Tam wad answer a great deal better, an it were your will.’

‘We will have you taught practically, and to profit,’ said the Master: ‘The three brethren, attendants on father Lawrence, shall take you to task this instant. They will act as your assistants and masters to-day, and to their hands I recommend you. Be expert, and spare no cost.’ So saying, he gave three tramps with his heel, as he was wont to do in time past, and instantly the three sable monks stood before him. ‘Take that comely youth,’ said he, ‘and bestow on him a few cogent lessons in the mysteries of the culinary art. You may teach him a few *varieties*.’ As he said this, there was a malignant smile rather darkened than lighted up his stern features, and on the instant the three monks had Gibbie from the ground; and one holding by each arm and another by both his feet, they rushed out of the hall with him, in the same way that one drives a wheelbarrow. When the men of the embassy heard the three tramps, and the words about the varieties, they looked at one another with rather uneasy sensations. But the presence of father Lawrence, and the other three holy brethren, encouraged them still to acquiesce in the Master’s request.

A short time after this, as they were sauntering about the castle, they heard some loud giggling laughter, intermixed with squeaking cries of despair; which last they could well distinguish as proceeding from the lungs of poor Gibbie Jordan; and immediately after that there came among them a huge red capon, fluttering and screaming in a most desperate and deplorable manner, and all the three monks pursuing him with shouts of delight. The feathers were half plucked off him, and his breath quite spent, so that they easily laid hold of him, and carried him away by the neck to have him spitted living, as they said. Our yeomen saw nothing but an overgrown bird, but they heard well that the voice was the voice of Jordan. ‘These monks are trifling and amusing themselves,’ said Tam; ‘we shall get no dinner before night.’

The words were hardly well said when the castle bell rung, and in they all rushed to the great hall where stood a plentiful dinner smoking along the board, and the abbot and the Master both seated at the upper end, side by side. Our yeomen thought it extraordinary to see the great warlock and the reverend father in such close compact, but they held their peace. The abbot

rose and pronounced a blessing on the food, but it was in an unknown tongue, and little did they wot of its purport. There was great variety on the table of every kind of food, yet there was not one of our yeomen knew of what the greater part of the dishes consisted. But the huge capon stood at the head of the table, and though he had been killed and cooked in a few minutes, the bird looked exceedingly well. The abbot and the Master devoured him with so much zest, that no one liked to call for a piece of him, save Tam Craik, who eat a wing of him; but there was no broad bone in his shoulder, yet Tam declared him the first meat he had ever tasted, save once, in his life. Charlie was placed next the Master, and Dan next the abbot Lawrence. The three monks, attendants on the latter, served the table, but nothing of the new steward made his appearance. The wine and other strong liquors were served round in great abundance, and the quality was so excellent, that, notwithstanding of the friar's charge, every one drank liberally, and soon got into high glee. Whenever the supreme and haughty abbot swallowed a cup of wine, Dan, who sat next him, heard always a hissing sound within his breast, as if one had been pouring water on red hot iron. This startled the trooper terribly for two or three times at first, but his surprise lessened and wore off by degrees as the liquor continued to exalt his spirits. The feast went on, and the wine flowed; but, as on a former occasion, the men ate without being satisfied. The wines and liquor were all however real, and had their due effect, so that the spirit of hilarity rose to a great height.

It was observed that father Lawrence conversed with no one but the Master, and the dialogue they held was all in an unknown tongue, in which tongue also, they sometimes conferred with the servitors. The Master left the table three several times, for he had a charm going on in another part of the castle, and at the third time returned with the black book of fate, the book of the dynasties of men, below his arm, and laid it closed on the table before him.

'Now, my brave and warlike guests,' said he, 'Before I open this awful book, it is meet that every one of you be blindfolded. I ask this for your own sakes. If any one of you were to look but on one character of this book, his brain would be seared to a cinder, his eyes would fly out of their sockets, and perhaps his whole frame might be changed into something unspeakable and monstrous.'

‘Gude faith, sir Master, I’ll haud my een as close as they were sewed up wi’ an elshin and a lingel,’ said Charlie. So said they all, but they were not trusted; the monks were ordered to go round the table and tie every one’s eyes closely up; and when this was done, they were desired to lay all their heads down upon their hands on the board, and to sit without moving, whatever they might hear. He then proceeded to open the massy iron clasps, and as soon as they were unloosed, three spirits burst from the book with loud shrieks, and escaped through the barbican. The yells were so piercing that some of our yeomen started from their seats, but dared not lift their heads. ‘Ah! They are gone,’ said the Master: ‘This weird will cost me dear!’

‘Fear nothing, but proceed,’ said father Lawrence.

He opened the book, and three peals of thunder ensued that shook the castle to its foundations, every one of them louder than the last; and though our yeomen sat trembling in utter darkness, they heard voices around them as if the hall had been crowded full of people; among others, they deemed that they could distinguish the voices of the warden and his lady. They, however, sat still as if chained to their places, awaiting the issue; and, after much noise and apparent interruptions, the great Master read out as follows:

‘He for whom this weird is read,
Be he son of battle bred,
Be he baron born to peril,
Be he lord, or be he earl,
Let him trust his gallant kin,
And the sword below the skin.
When the red buck quits the cover,
When the midnight watch is over,
Then, whatever may betide,
Trust the horn, and trust the hide,
He that drives shall feel the gin,
But he that’s driven shall get in.
All for whom this weird is read,
For the living, for the dead,
From the chief with corslet shorn,
To the babe that is unborn,
Let them to the sceptre lean,

Till the place where they have been
See their sway expand untroubled,
Doubled, doubled, nine times doubled;
First to rise and rule the rings,
Mixed with blood of mighty kings.
This is read for princes, peers,
And children of a thousand years;
Now begins their puissant story;
Strike the blow and gain the glory.
Rise not against feudal union,
No advance but in communion,
Though through battle, broil, and murther –.
Shut the book, and read no further.'

The book was closed, and loud shouts of applause, as from a great multitude, were heard at a distance; as that died away, a peal of thunder burst forth over their heads, which rolled away with an undulating sound, till lost in the regions of the western heavens.

Our yeomen's eyes were then unbound, and when they looked up the book of fate was removed, and the Master was fallen back on his seat, with his countenance mightily distorted; but the abbot and his attendants would not suffer any to touch him till he recovered of himself. He again rose into high and unwonted spirits; but his elevation was rather like the delirium of a man driven to desperation, than that flow of delightful hilarity, the offspring of a temperate and well regulated mind. The borderers persevered in their libations, and the mirth and noise increased till near the fall of the evening, when Charlie again proposed to go; but the Master protested against it for a short space, adding, that he had to give them a practical lesson how their captain ought to proceed, if he would be the greatest man in Scotland. This was quite sufficient to prevail on Yardbire, and none of the rest appeared much disposed to move.

About this time some of our yeomen, sitting with their faces toward the casement, beheld a novel scene, which they called up the rest to witness. This was the Master's new steward, the late laird of the Peatstacknowe, making his escape from the castle with all possible speed. He was stripped half naked, and bareheaded; had thrown himself over the outer wall, lest he

should be seen going by the gate, and was running up the hollow of Aikwood burn, among the trees, to elude discovery. Presently afterwards they beheld two of the monks stretching after him with a swiftness not to be outrun. Poor Gibbie was soon overhied and brought back, not in the most gentle manner; and, instead of carrying him round by the gate, which, having been broken up, stood wide open, they took him by the heels, and threw him over the wall, at the place he had leaped before. Gibbie gave a loud squeak in the air, as he came over the wall with a wheeling motion; and falling on the other side, every one believed that there would not be a whole bone left in his body. Instead of that he sprung to his feet, and ran across the court, saying to himself, 'I'll tell you what – It minds me o' hell this place – if ever there was ane upon earth.' He got not time to finish the sentence till he was again seized, and hauled into the castle.

'Master Michael Scott, I protest in my master's name against this usage of a leal vassal and tiend laird,' said Charlie.

'The comely youth is mine by your own agreement,' said the Master: 'He shall be well seen to. Perhaps I shall only keep him for a season, until better supplied. Be content; the matter is now beyond disputation. In the meantime I will proceed to give you a specimen of my profound art, of which you have now seen many instances; and also of my esteem for your captain, to whom you will be so good as repeat this.'

He then went away to his arcana, and brought a bason of liquor, resembling wine, which he sprinkled on all his guests in small proportions, and taking his seat beside the supercilious abbot, the two sat apparently waiting for some grand metamorphosis. The spell, powerful as it was, had not the effect that was surmised. These rude warriors of a former age had principles of virtue and honour in their natures that withstood the charms of necromancy – those charms before which noble dames, cruel laymen, and selfish clergy sunk down confounded and overpowered. The countenances of a few of the troopers were somewhat changed by the spell, assuming thereby a sort of resemblance to beasts, but this their associates only laughed at, deeming it occasioned by the drunkenness of the individuals affected. The two great personages at the head of the table viewed the matter in a different light, and that with evident symptoms of disappointment. They comprehended the reason, for they knew there was but one against which the powers of darkness could not prevail; and, after

holding a conversation about it in their own mysterious language, they set about the accomplishment of their desires, for, though a matter of no great avail, the Master could not brook to be baulked in any of his works of divination. The purport of this conversation was, what the Master had once proposed before, that the men must be made accessory to their own transformation; and in this project he forthwith engaged with all manner of earnestness.

CHAPTER 25

He can turn a man into a boy;
  A boy into an ass;
He can change your gold into white moneye;
  Your white moneye into brass;
He can turn our goodman to a beast
  With hoof, but, an' with horn,
And chap the goodwife in her cheer,
  This little John Barleycorn.

Old Song

The plan of our great necromancer was no other than that of pushing round the wine, and other strong intoxicating liquors, to the utmost extremity; and it is well known that these stimulating beverages have charms that no warrior, or other person accustomed to violent exertions, can withstand, after indulging in them to a certain extent. The mirth and argument, or rather the bragg of weir, grew first obstreperous, afterwards boisterous and unruly, and several of the men got up and strode the hall with drawn swords, without being able to tell with whom they were offended or going to fight. Neither the Master nor the abbot discouraged this turmoil, but pushed round the liquor, till some of the most intimate friends and associates of the party, in the extravagance of intoxication, actually wounded one another, and afterwards blubbered, like children, for vexation. While they were all in this state of unnatural elevation, father Lawrence got up, and addressed himself to the party, for the first time. He represented to them, by striking metaphors, the uncertainty and toil of the warrior's life; and requested all such of them as loved ease, freedom, and independence, to become inmates of his habitation; and during the time of their noviciates, he promised them every good thing. Several of them pretended to snap at the proffer, some on one condition, some on another; but when he presented a scroll of parchment, written in red characters, for their marks or signatures,

no one would sign and seal, save Tam Craik, who put his mark to it three times with uncommon avidity, on the positive condition that he was to have as much fat flesh as he could eat for the first three years, at all times that he chose, by day or by night.

When matters were at this pass, and our brave yeomen could with difficulty rise to their feet, they heard a chorus of sweet and melodious music approaching, which still drew nearer and nearer. This was a treat they little expected in such an habitation; but how much greater was their surprise, when the hall-door was thrown open, and there were ushered in thirty of the most lovely maidens that the eyes of men had ever beheld. They seemed, too, to be all of noble lineage, for they were dressed like eastern princesses, rustling in their silks, and covered over with dazzling gems. The Master welcomed them with stately courtesy, apologizing for the state of his castle, and the necessity they would be under of sitting down and sharing the feast with warriors, who, however, he assured them were all gallant gentlemen, of his own kin, and some of them of his own name. The splendid dames answered, that nothing on earth would give them so much delight as to share the feast with gentlemen and warriors, the natural protectors of their helpless sex, to whom it should be their principal aim to pay all manner of deference.

As soon as the door was opened, our brave yeomen, with the profound respect that men of their boisterous occupation always pay to female beauty and rare accomplishments, started all to their feet, and made their obeisance. But the worst concern for them was, that they could not stand on their feet. Some of them propped themselves on the hilts of their sheathed swords, leaning the points backward against the wall. Others kept a sly hold of the buff-belt of the comrade next to him; and a few, of whom the poet was one, and Tam another, lost their balance, and fell back over the benches, showing the noble dames the soles of their sandals. All was silence and restraint, and a view of no group could be more amusing; for though our heroes were hardly able to behave themselves with the utmost propriety, yet they were all endeavouring to do it; some keeping their mouths close shut, that no misbecoming word might possibly escape from their lips; some turning up their white faces, manifesting evident symptoms of sickness, and some unable to refrain their joy at this grand addition to their party.

The first breaking up of the conversation was likewise extremely curious; but it was begun in so many corners about the same time, it is impossible to detail it all. Will Martin, with a lisping unbowsome tongue, addressed the one next to him to the following effect.

'Fine evening this, noble dame.'

'Do you account this so very fine an evening, gallant knight?'

'Hem, hem; glorious roads too; most noble lady – paced all with – marble, you know. Hem! Came you by the marble path, fair lady? Hem! hem!'

'Not by the marble path, most courteous knight, but on one of alabaster, bordered with emeralds, rubies, and diamonds you know. Hem! hem!'

'May all the powers – Hem – powers of beauty, you know – Ay – hem! and love. Hem! What was I about to say?'

'Could not guess, knight.'

'That smile is so sweet. Will such an – hem! – such an angelic creature – really con – descend to converse familiarly with a plain homely warrior?'

'Your notice does me far too much honour, worthy knight.' And so saying she put the tip of her palm gently on the warrior's rough hand. Intoxicated as Will was with wine, he was petrified with astonishment and delight, and could not find terms to express his gratitude and adoration. Many others were likewise by the same time testifying, by their bright and exulting looks, the joy and delight they were experiencing in the conversation of those most beautiful and refined of all earthly objects. Tam Craik beheld, or thought he beheld, his lovely Kell among them, blooming in tenfold loveliness. He was so drunk that he could not articulate one syllable; but he fixed his long coulter-nose and grey eyes steadily in the direction of her face, and put his hand below the table and scratched.

Still the cup and the cates circulated without any respite. The Master and the abbot both called them round and round; and though the lovely and high-born dames tasted sparingly, nevertheless the circumstances of their having touched the cup with their lips was sufficient to induce the enamoured warriors to drink to them in healths deep and dangerous. Reason had long been tottering on her throne with the best of them, but these amorous draughts of homage overthrew her completely, and laid her grovelling in the dust. The heroes fell from their seats first by ones, but ere the last in threes and fours. Still the courteous and sympathetic beauties

tried to administer comfort and assistance to their *natural protectors*, by holding up their heads, and chafing their temples; but, in spite of all they could do, total oblivion of passing events ensued to the whole of our incautious troopers.

The next morning presented a scene in the great hall of Aikwood, which, if it cannot be described, neither can it ever be conceived. There lay our troop of gallant yeomen, as good as ever heaved buckler, scattered over the floor; some in corners, some below benches, every one of their eyes sealed in profound slumber though the day was well advanced, and every one having an inamorata in his arms, or clinging close to him of her own accord. At a given signal, the great bell of the castle was rung with a knell that might have wakened the dead. The sleepers raised their drowsy and aching heads all at the same time; and, as was natural, every one turned his eyes first toward the partner of his slumbers. Their sensations may be in some measure conceived, when, instead of the youthful, blooming, angelic beings, whom they had seen over-night, there lay a group of the most horrible hags that ever opened eyes on the light of day. Instead of the light, flowing, and curled hair, there hung portions of grey dishevelled locks. Instead of the virgin bloom of the cheek, and the brilliant enamel of the eye, all was rheum, haggardness, and deformity. Some had two or three long pitted teeth, of the colour of amber; some had none. Their lovely mouths were adorned with curled and silvery mustachios; and their fair necks were shrivelled and seriated like the bark of a pinetree. Instead of the rustling silks and dazzling jewels, they were all clothed in noisome rags; and, to crown the horror of our benumbed and degraded Bacchanalians, every one of the witches had her eyes fixed on her partner, gleaming with hellish delight at the state to which they had reduced themselves, and the horrors of their feelings. The poet, and two or three others, fell into convulsions; and all of them turned away groaning, and hid their faces from these objects of abhorrence.

The Master came with his enchanted liquor once more, and sprinkled it over the prostrate and humbled group, who were now in that state of mental agony that rendered them indifferent to aught that could occur; and, as he sprinkled them, he said to himself, ‘I now have the power over you, though you had been seven times anointed in holy church.’

‘Aye, seven times seven,’ said a tremendous voice; and the words were followed by a laugh that shook the vault of the hall, which laugh was echoed by three or four accordant voices, and afterwards by all the witches in the apartment. The astounded warriors again raised their heads, and beheld their friend, the abbot, stalking along and along the hall in the midst of them in majesty sublime. He wore the same sable and flowing robes, and the same mitre, that he did on the preceding day; but he was now striding openly in his own character, with his legs shagged and hairy, shaped like those of a goat, and his feet cloven into two distinct and horny hoofs. The three attendants were there also, but they were no more three monks, but the identical Prig, Prim, and Pricker, the infernal pages of Master Michael Scott. In short, our yeomen discovered, to their utter despair, that they had been riding, eating, and drinking, hand to fist, with the devil in *propria persona*.

Before giving any of them time to recover their senses, he strode up to Dan Chisholm, and stooping over him with exultation, he said, ‘Did not I tell you, Christian droich, when I bayed you at the mill, that I would be before hand with you at Melrose, and have not I kept my word?’ As he said these words, Dan once more saw down his throat, and beheld the burning flame within. Half-dead with fright, he threw himself back on the floor, and held up one foot and one hand, as his last inefficient defence, on which his infernal Majesty vomited such a torrent of sparkling flame out upon him and his forlorn partners, that they lost all hope of ever again moving from the place where they were.

‘Take heart, my brave fellows,’ said the Master. ‘This great primate, you see, is no other than the prince of the power of the air, the great controller of the mighty elements, who has honoured us with his company. You are now in his power, and lie at his mercy; but he is more of a gentleman than he is generally represented to be, and will scorn to take advantage of a few poor insignificant creatures, who call themselves Christians, of whose company he is sure before he wants it. He knows you will fume, and bully, and fight for a few short years, sending one another home to his ample mansions in myriads before your time. Both he and I would scorn to take farther advantage of beings so blind ignorant, and inconsistent, than suits our own amusement. We only love to mock you, show you your own littleness, and how easy a prey you would be, were there a being in the universe that

watched for ever over your destruction. Cheer up, gallant soldiers! and now for the long-waited development of mighty moment. I will show you the manner, and very mode, by which your captain must only hope to succeed in his great enterprise.'

He then touched every one of them with the divining-rod that was in his hand, pronouncing at the same time some mystic words, which none of them comprehended. While he was thus occupied, the witches rushed from the hall, and as soon as he had touched the hindmost, he himself also made his escape, and looked from a crevice of an inner wall. The enchantment began immediately to take effect; the warriors rolled about on the floor in strong convulsions, bellowing and flouncing, trying always to run on all-four, and then tumbling over again. At length their noses and chins began to grow forward in hideous disproportion, till their heads began to assume something of the forms of the heads of beasts, and liker to those of calves than any things else. The laughter that pealed from loop-hole, crevice, and barbican, was, at this eventual period, excessive. The devil, the three wicked spirits, the great enchanter, and his conventicle of witches, seemed all to be in convulsions at witnessing how the metamorphosed champions shook their long heads, looked at one another, and tried to speak. How their language changed from long-drawn words, half pronounced, to downright confused bellowings; and how their forms, in the space of a few minutes, gradually assumed those of as many mighty and ferocious bulls.

'I have now given you your own proper shapes, and showed you in frames suited to your natures,' cried the Master, from a crevice.

'Pass forth, and be gone; and carry my respects to your captain.'

Then there was a combined bellow of rage arose in the hall that would have rent any castle to the top but that of Aikwood; and benches, boards, and couches, flew about in flinders on the horns of the furious monsters. Forthwith they rushed out into the great court, and from that to the side of the hill, bellowing, and tearing up the ground with hoof and horn, till the country was alarmed for many miles round; and, believing that all hell was broke loose from the castle of Aikwood that day, they betook them to their heels, and fled away out of sight and out of hearing.

The outrageous drove looked back as they ascended the brae to the eastward of the castle, and saw the devil and the great warlock, standing on the topmost tower, laughing at them; the former appearing of a size and

dimensions equal to those of another castle. The grand mitre that he wore on his head, shaped like a crescent to conceal his horns, now moved like a cornuted black cloud amid the firmament; his eyes glimmered like two of the reddest of the stars of heaven; and the sceptre that he waved in his right hand was like a tremendous pine all in flame, or rather like a burning aerial meteor. Our transformed warriors galloped away in terror as fast as cloven hoofs could carry them, with one mighty bison, that had once been Charlie Scott, far a-head of all the rest; for, notwithstanding of all that Charlie had seen and heard in favours of the devil, he felt as much affrighted for him as ever, degraded as he was in form. No wonder was it that our tumultuous group was terrified and galloped off; for at the same time that they saw Satan stretching out his sceptre in his right hand, he held out Tam Craik by the nape of the neck in his left, while the poor fellow was seen sprawling and spurning the air over an unfathomed void. When the arch-fiend made his retreat from among the warriors that morning, in the midst of the confusion he carried Tam off with him, according to compact – fed him for some time on animal food of the richest quality, which, never once satisfying him, the devil grew weary of such a voracious cur, and twisted his neck about.

The drove was no sooner out of sight, than the Master said to one of his pages, ‘Pricker, assume thou the habit that thou hadst yester-eve; mount, and ride after these wild cattle, and deliver them over to the charge of their dolt of a confessor. He will try to rescue them from their present degraded and brutal forms, but he will not be able. Spirit, thou sawest a part of the charms performed. Give him the proper directions how to find it out before leaving him. It boots nothing offending my kinsman, the Warden.’

Pricker mounted his horse, and rode straight for the fords of Howden-burn, where he knew the friar was awaiting his companions, and meant to have driven them all up before him to the cottage door, where the friar and his fair ward sojourned, and there delivered them over to the care of these two, as a present of fine beeves from the great Master to Sir Ringan Redhough. But before the infernal page overtook them they were all at the door of the cottage, bellowing and kneeling, and trying in vain to make their hard case known to the friar.

Pricker came up, and saluted the friar, who, observing his clerical habit, returned the compliment in a hurried and careless manner – for he was

confounded by the arrival of so many mad bulls.

‘Reverend brother mine,’ said the page, ‘I deliver over into thy charge this herd of beautiful cattle, the best breed that ever roamed the forests of Caledon. They are a present from Master Michael Scott to his cousin the Warden of the middle marches. See that you deliver them safe and sound.’

‘Lo, thou seest with thine eyes, and thou also hearest with the hearing of the ear,’ said the friar, ‘that the creatures are outrageous, and not to be governed by the hand of a single man. And thinkest thou a brother of the holy order of Benedict would take a goad in his hand, and ride forth after these bulls of Bashan? Lo, would they not even run headlong upon my mule, and thrust their horns into his side? Thy servant also, and this maiden, would they tread under their feet? Go to! Thou speakest as one lacking understanding.’

‘I give them in charge to thee, as desired by one with whom it is dangerous to contend,’ said the page; ‘and alongst with them this request, that your captain will make away with them as quickly as possible for food to his army.’

At these words of the apparent sacristan there was such a roaring and bellowing commenced among the herd, that, for the first time, the friar began to suspect some horrid enchantment, but wist not what to dread. The drove turned round their heads to the speaker – shook them in disapproval of what he had said, and joined in such a ferocious roar against him, that it was not like ought the friar had ever witnessed among the brute creation before. The metamorphosed troopers, however, knew too well now who Pricker was to attack him, but, turning again round, they came in a row, and kneeled around the friar, looking at him with the most supplicating expressions of countenance that ever cattle put on.

‘Lo, methinks I have looked upon these wild beasts of the forest in some of the days that are past,’ said the friar, ‘and that their countenances are not entirely unknown to me; though when, or in what place, in that thing my memory upholdeth me not. I pray thee, brother, to declare unto thy servant where thou camest by these beasts of mine acquaintance. If thou art a follower of the worthy Father Lawrence, thou must speak the truth –. Tell me, art thou a Christian?’

The bulls gave not the infernal page time to reply. They turned about, shook their heads, and tossed the earth at him with their horns, raising at the

same time such an outcry of rage against him that the friar himself was afraid, and retreated within the door of the cottage; and he thought that, amid their confused bellowings, he could distinguish as it were these words pronounced, ‘He a Christian! Away with him! Away with him!’

‘Lo, what am I to understand by all this?’ said the friar. ‘Come near unto me, thou man of mystery, that comest like one of the children of Esau, with thy cattle and thy herds, and tell unto thy servant what are these?’

Pricker would not, however, come nigh the friar, but still kept his distance; for against the friar’s spiritual armour he durst not engage; but he called out to him, in mockery, ‘I then declare unto thee, O thou great magician, who camest to cope with the prince of all magicians, Master Michael Scott, that these are thy master’s yeomen whom thou leftest with him yesterday. Now, what sayest thou? Hast thou ever witnessed power like this?’

The friar lifted up his eyes to heaven, and tears fell down on his dark beard. ‘O wretched man that I am!’ cried he, ‘why did I leave my children in the lion’s den? yea, even in the den of the great lion. Wo is me, that this breach hath been made among the followers of my Master! But there is One that can yet controul all the powers of darkness, and to Him alone must I apply without delay.’

The friar went instantly to his devotions, and performed many rites of a nature too sacred to be here minutely described; yet, after all his exorcisms, the men could not regain their natural shapes, but lay and rolled about on the valley in awful convulsions. The hellish page, who had kept far aloof during the time of the friar’s sacred appeal, now came galloping near to enjoy the convulsions of the herd, and the grief and astonishment of the friar; and after mocking for some time, in obedience to the great wizard’s command, he called to the friar, and said, ‘I see he that brought about this wonderful metamorphosis – for which you shall one day be grateful – can only effect the counter-charm. Look into the manes on their foreheads, and look narrowly;’ and having said these words, he darted off towards Aikwood with the speed of lightning.

The friar did as this flying horseman had directed, and searching the long curled mane between the horns of the first monster that came to his hand, he there found stitched a small scroll of parchment, neatly rolled up, and written in blood. Then he caused them to bring him fire, in which he burnt

it, and presently there stood up at his hand one of Sir Ringan Redhough's warriors, in all his arms and accoutrements as he first arrived at the castle of Aikwood. 'By the life of Pharaoh!' cried the friar, 'surely this excelleth all that I beheld heretofore!'

The spell was now quickly dissolved; but no pen can do any justice to the feelings of our amazed troopers, as they again strode the green in their own forms and vigour, embracing the friar, and thanking him as their deliverer. They returned back over the ridge, not without some dreadful apprehensions, to the mill of Aikwood for their horses, but went no more in view of the portentous castle. They found their horses at good feed; and whenever Charlie saw Corby's skin, that glittered like the plumes of the raven, he cried, 'Aha, Corby lad, ye haena wantit either meat or drink, ye rascal! Od ye hae fared better than your master, ye cock-luggit glooming thief; stall up, ye dog, till I caparison you, and then let us bound for the border.'

But the most curious and least suspected of all the circumstances attending the horses was, that Dan Chisholm's horse and those of his three companions, that they left stabled in the deep dell above Lindean, were all found standing at the mill among the rest. The miller could give no farther account about them, than that a lad brought them all tied to one another's tails, and said they belonged to four of the baron of Mountcomyn's men that were gone to Aikwood. 'By the Lord Soules,' cried Dan, 'then it is true that Master Michael Scott said of the devil being more of a gentleman than he had been generally represented. For all the pranks he has played us, I'll think the better of him for this the longest day I have to live. What say you to this, friend Yardbire?'

'I shall be twenty miles off Aikwood at least afore I speak another sentence about either him or some others that I ken o'. Mercy on us! poor Tam Craik! What an end he has made wi' his fat bacon! Hech, but it be a despisable thing to rin open mouth to the – I'll no mention whae – for their greed o' meat. Some may hae gotten nae mair than what they deserved; but as for sachless Gibbie Jordan, he has been right hardly dealt wi'. My heart's unco wae for the poor laird, and I think something should be done to recover him.'

'Something *shall* be done for him,' said the friar, 'and that of such momentous consequence, that, if his own iniquities keep him not in

bondage, all the powers of the evil one shall be unequal to the task.'

After all these horrid perils of weird women and witchcraft thus miraculously overcome, our troop rode straight on to the camp of the Warden, and found him in the vicinity of Wooller, having come into those parts to counteract the rising about Berwick in behalf of the English garrison. And the time being at hand on which he must either do or not do, either join with heart and hand in the cause of the Douglas, or leave him to stand or fall by himself, and abide by the consequences – his impatience for the return of his men from Aikwood castle had been commensurate with the importance that he attached to their mission. But when they informed him of all the wonders they had witnessed, and the transmutations they had seen and undergone – how the warlock and his spirits had raised the tempests, deluged the plains, levelled the forests, and cleft asunder the everlasting mountains, the baron was like one in a trance. It was long before they could make themselves accredited, or impress him with any other idea than that it was a story made up to astonish him. With the feats performed by the friar, he was particularly pleased, and from that time forth paid him more honour than he had ever been seen pay to man. But the precise meaning of the destiny, read for him out of the book of fate, puzzled and interested him most of all. It was dark and full of intricacies; and it was not till after long consultation with wise men, as well as women, that any thing like a guess could be formed of its tendency. By making words and actions to coalesce, a mode of procedure was at the last pitched on as the only one reconcileable with the predictions. This mode will eventually appear without giving the detail at present, and the reader will then be better able to judge whether or not the Redhough and his sages understood the Master's signs and injunctions properly.

CHAPTER 26

Here away, there away, wandering Willie,
Here away, there away, haud away hame.

Old Song

We have now performed the waggoner's difficult and tedious task with great patience, and scarcely less discretion, having brought all the various groups of our *dramatis personae*, up to the same period of time. It now behoves us (that is, Isaac the curate and me,) to return again to the leading event, namely, the siege of Roxburgh.

The state of mind to which the two commanders were now reduced was truly pitiable. Within the castle of Roxburgh, all was sullen gloom and discontent. In one thing, and that only, were they unanimous, which was in a frantic inveteracy against the Scots; and though Musgrave, with the feelings of a man, would gladly have saved those dearest to him in life, yet he found that to have proposed such a thing as yielding to the garrison, would have been but adding fuel to flame in order to extinguish it. Their small supply soon began again to wear short; and, moreover, the privations to which they were subjected, had brought on an infectious distemper among them, of which some died every day; but every item added to their sufferings, fell into the scale against the Scots, and all the cruelties exercised by the latter, in order to break the spirits of their opponents, only militated against themselves. Opposition to the last man was a sentiment nursed in every English bosom within the garrison, with a brooding enthusiasm of delight. There can be no doubt that they felt intensely for their gallant captain, considering the dismal situation in which he stood with respect to their enemies, and the strong hold they had been enabled to keep over his heart. It was probably the burning intensity of these feelings that was the great source of their unhappiness, and gave rise to the fierce spirit of dissension that daily manifested itself. Although they detested the

deed the Scots had committed in executing Sir Richard, yet they felt his death a sort of relief, as by it one-half of the cord which their hated adversaries held round the breast of their commander was broken, and there is little doubt that they wished themselves free of Lady Jane Howard, by fair and gentle means if possible, but at all events to be rid of that remaining tie, which almost maddened them to think of.

There was one circumstance which of late was to all of them wholly unaccountable. As the day of the Conception of the blessed Virgin approached, the mind of Lord Musgrave, instead of becoming altogether deranged as they had foreboded, became more and more steady and collected. He watched over every part of the economy within that huge fortress, and gave his orders with punctuality and decision, although with a degree of sterness that had not previously been observed.

The dreaded day of the Conception at length arrived; and, before noon, crowds of the citizens, and people from the surrounding country, began to assemble around the Scottish camp. These were forcibly kept beyond the line of circumvallation, while the regular troops were drawn up in columns both to the east and west of the fortress, and particularly round the gibbet on the Bush-Law. At eleven o'clock the Scottish trumpets sounded; the English soldiers crowded to the battlements around the western tower of the citadel, and Lord Musgrave came up among the rest, arrayed in a splendid suit of light armour, and gallantly attended.

These battlements and the new gibbet were, as before stated, right opposite to one another, and separated only by the breadth of the moat and a very small slope on the western ascent; so that every object could be distinctly seen from the one place to the other, and, by raising the voice somewhat, a conversation could be carried on across. At the very time that Lord Musgrave thus appeared on the wall, the Lady Jane Howard and Sir *Richard* Musgrave were introduced on the boards of the gibbet. Yes – read it over again. I say Sir Richard Musgrave, for it was truly he. The Douglas, seeing that he could not prevail, and that the gallant youth was given up by his brother and the English to his fate, could not brook the idea of losing by his death the one-half of the influence he held over Musgrave. But that he might try it by stretching it to the very last, he clothed another culprit in Sir Richard's habiliments, tied a white cloth over his face, let him stand a proclaimed space on the boards with the cord about his neck, and, at the last

moment of the given time, there being no parley sounded for the delivering up of the keys of the fortress, the board sunk, and the man died; but Sir Richard was safe in hold.

He was again produced that day, being the eighth of December, along with Lady Jane. He was dressed in the suit of armour in which he fought on the day he was taken prisoner, and Lady Jane in pure snow-white robes, betokening her spotless virginity. Sir Richard's eye beamed with manly courage, but the fresh hues of the rose on the cheeks of Lady Jane had blenched, and given place to the most deadly paleness. Both hosts were deeply affected with the sight, and on this occasion both felt alike. There was not a heart amongst them that did not overflow with pity at the unhappy fate of the two youthful prisoners, whose dismal doom could now no longer be averted, unless by a sacrifice on the part of the English, with which even the most sanguine of the beleaguering army doubted their compliance.

The Douglas then caused a herald to make proclamation in a stentorian voice; first stating the cause why he had put off the execution of Sir Richard Musgrave until that day, namely, his anxious desire to save the life of the noble youth, on the ground that the purposed holding out of the garrison till the twenty-fourth was a chimera; and, secondly, declaring that, unless the keys of the castle were previously delivered up to him, precisely at the hour of noon, the noble and gallant Sir Richard, the flower of English chivalry, should be put down; and the beautiful and accomplished Lady Jane Howard, the betrothed bride and devoted lover of Lord Musgrave, subjected to a fate the most humiliating, and the most deplorable, that ever noble maiden suffered, and that in full view of both armies. A loud murmur of detestation sounded from the walls of the castle, but the columns of the Scottish army stood and looked on in mute and tender sorrow. Lord Musgrave placed himself right opposite the prisoners, turned his face straight toward them, and gazed with an unmoved and undaunted air. Sir Richard addressed him in the same sentiments he had formerly expressed, the purport of which was, it will be remembered, the madness and folly of holding out the castle, now when the bright and unequalled prize for which he contended was lost. For his own life, he said, he accounted it as nothing in the scale; but the fate that awaited the lady of his love, who had shewn such devotion to his person and interests, was not to be endured or

permitted by any knight of honour. Lady Jane cried out to him to save her from a doom before which her whole soul shrunk; adding, that she had done much, and suffered much, for him, and would he not make one effort, one sacrifice, to save her?

'Lord Douglas,' cried Musgrave, 'Will not a formal consignment of all my lands, titles, and privileges in the dominions of England, ransom the lives of these two?'

'Not if they were ten times doubled,' returned the Douglas: 'Nor shall any earthly thing ransom them, save the full and free possession of the castle of Roxburgh. I have myself suffered a loss at your hands, of which you are not aware; and I long and thirst to revenge it on you and your house.'

'Then my resolution is fixed!' cried Musgrave: 'Though all England should deprecate the deed, and though I know my brethren in arms disapprove of it, I must and will redeem the lives of these two. Yes, I will save them, and that without abating one iota from the honour of the house of Musgrave. Not make one effort, Lady Jane? Not one sacrifice to save your honour and life? Effort, indeed, I will make none. But, *without* an effort, I will make a sacrifice of as high estimation for you as ever knight offered up for the lady of his love. Perhaps it may not be in my power to save you; but in the sight of these rival armies – in yours my only brother and betrothed bride – and in the sight of heaven – I offer the last ransom that can be offered by man.' As he said these words, he flung himself headlong from the battlement of the western tower, struck on the mural parapet around the lower platform, then on the rampart, from which he flew with a rolling bound, and flashed with prodigious force into the ample moat. There, by the weight of his armour, he sunk forthwith to rise no more. The troops of the rival nations stood aghast, with uplifted hands, gazing on the scene; but no more was to be seen of the gallant Musgrave! A gurgling boil of bloody water arose above him as he sank to the bottom – and that was the last movement caused in this world by one whose life had been spent in deeds of high chivalry and restless commotion.

Excepting one shriek uttered by Lady Jane, the Douglas was the first to break the awful silence, which he did by these words: 'There fell a hero indeed! Noble and resolute Musgrave! I cannot but envy you such a chivalrous fate as this!' Many such expressions of enthusiastic admiration

burst from both armies, not in shouts of applause, for these were suppressed by sorrow, but in a low and melting pathos that bespoke the soul's regret as well as approval.

When these first expressions of feeling were over, the dark and manly countenance of Douglas sunk into more than usual gloom and dejection. All the advantages given him, and which he had deemed insurmountable by his opponents, were by this desperate act of Musgrave's extinguished. He had now no more power over the English garrison than what he could make good with his sword and his bow. To have executed his threats on Sir Richard, and the lovely and romantic Lady Jane, would only have been an act of poor and despicable revenge, which would have disgusted his own followers, and could in no degree have furthered his cause; so he ordered them back to confinement, with directions that they should be attended according to their rank.

What was next to be done? That was the great question. Douglas never once conceived the idea of giving up the enterprise; for though the princess for whom he had undertaken it was now no more, his broad domains were all engaged. The very existence of the house of Douglas depended on his success; and, besides, the king had more daughters, though none like his beloved and accomplished Margaret. Therefore Douglas had no hesitation regarding the necessity of taking the castle. He was determined to have it. But what to do next, in order to accomplish this determination, was the question. Circumstances were grievously changed with him. The garrison had got a supply across the Teviot-bridge during the time of the flood and the tempest, but the Scots could not ascertain to what amount. Sir Thomas Musgrave had been joined by some troops from the shores of Northumberland, and had issued forth with these and the greater part of the garrison of Berwick, to the amount of 5000 men, in order to make a diversion in favour of the garrison of Roxburgh. This movement by the governor of Berwick disconcerted the Douglas most of all. A party of these marauders had shewed themselves on the height about Hume castle, with trumpets sounding and colours waving in the air. From thence they marched on, keeping the backs of the hills, until they came into the lower parts of Leaderdale, which they harried, burning in their way the town and castle of Ercildon. They next made a movement towards Melrose, meaning to establish themselves in the rear of Douglas, and either to cut off his

supplies, or force him to abandon the siege, in order to preserve his own country behind him. But when they came to the river Tweed they were opposed by the brave abbot Lawrence, not the feigned and infernal abbot that our yeomen left at Aikwood, but the real worthy and apostolic Lawrence himself. He had raised all the abbey vassals and retainers, and shewed fairly disposed to dispute the passage of the English over the river. In the meantime he posted message after message to Douglas, to come, or send to his assitance, before the abbey of the holy Virgin, with all its sacred stores, should fall into the hands of their ruthless enemies.

Douglas was hardly put to it. If he drew off from a close blockade, the English were sure to take advantage of his absence, make a sally, and procure plenty of more provisions; and, in that case, his only probable hope of success was cut off. On the other hand, if he suffered himself to be inclosed between two armies, his situation would become every day more precarious, and perhaps in the issue quite untenable. He was, therefore, in a manner forced to the resolution of making an effort to join father Lawrence, and of giving the captain of Berwick battle before he attained possession of the rich monastry of Melrose.

The time was now arrived when the support of Sir Ringan Redhough and his borderers was become absolutely necessary. Without their co-operation in a more close and decisive manner than that in which they had hitherto conducted themselves, he could not now proceed one foot, and his great cause was ruined. He therefore dispatched a pressing message to the chief, conjuring him as his friend and fellow-soldier, either to come and supply his place in the blockade of Roxburgh, or march with all expedition to Melrose, and give battle to the governor of Berwick. The dogged and unyielding Warden returned for answer, that it had always been his chief and undivided aim to act in concert with his noble and gallant friend, and lord superior, the Earl of Douglas and Mar. But that he had a peculiar charge from his Sovereign, of the English marches, which it was his bounden duty to attend to, prior to all other considerations. Whatever he could do conformable with this first duty, should not be wanting. Finally, he sent him word, as he had done formerly, ‘that if he coudna take the castle, and confessed that he coudna take it, he might send word to him, and he wad take it for him.’

‘What does the crabbed carle always mean by that answer?’ said the Douglas, when it was reported to him: ‘Perhaps he has some means of communication with those within the fortress, some secret friend in disguise among our enemies. Perhaps he knows of some weak or accessible point among these extensive bulwarks, or perhaps he reckons on some plausible means of surmounting them; for the devil’s head is not more fruitful in expedients than his. This is a matter of such importance to me at present, that I must try to probe it to the bottom. Were I sure that he could accomplish his boasted feat, I had better engage him to it with one-third of my dominions; and at all events, I must procure the active assistance of his energetic force at present, whatever may be the equivalent required. Let my white stead Beaver be caparisoned, and my attendants in readiness; I must have an interview with this man of the mountains before I sleep.’

The Warden had drawn his force down to Wooller, with the intention of co-operating more effectively with the Douglas. He had heard of the advantages that lord held over his adversaries, but nothing of the late catastrophe by which they were all removed. Deeming therefore that the chances were mainly on the side of the Douglas, he judged it his safest course to act in complete concert with him. Above all, the words out of the black book of fate had been conveyed to him as read by the greatest magician in the world. From all that could be made out of that mystic rhyme, after long consultation, it appeared that it behoved the Warden and his friends to go hand in hand with Douglas. ‘Rise not against feudal union – No advance but in communion,’ were words hardly to be misinterpreted. The words of the prophecy, and the ludicrous metamorphosis were all taken into account, compared, computed, and over again computed – and the sequel was a decisive resolution to support the Douglas and join issues with him. But, in the meantime, *still to make the most of a bad bargain*.

This resolution had been taken, and so far acted upon, that trusty agents had been despatched all over the country in disguise, to execute a portion of the great concerted plan, when the Douglas, at a late hour in the evening, arrived in the Warden’s camp. He then had proofs experimentally of the Warden’s caution and vigilance. He came upon his outposts at a great distance from the main body of his army. These withstood his passage, but seeing his retinue so small, for he was attended only by two knights, a squire, and a guide, they conducted him from one post to another, till at

length they brought him completely guarded to the Warden's head-quarters; which was nothing more than a lowly cottage at Wooller haugh-head.

The doughty chief and his kinsmen were still sitting in earnest conversation round a rustic table, with a tremendous torch in the middle of it. This was nothing less than a huge broken jar full of refined ox's tallow, and a slow peat stuck to the head in the middle, which being kindled emitted a blaze like a fish light. The gallant kinsmen were in deep consultation anent their grand plan of warlike operations, and the more they conversed about it the more eligible did it still appear to them, and the more deeply did they get interested in it; so that when the knight in waiting announced a stranger who requested an interview with Sir Ringan, every one seemed disposed to refuse him admission.

'Tell him I am engaged,' said the Warden.

'O yes. By all means. Tell him we are engaged,' said Dickie o' Dryhope.

'If it is another message from the Douglas, I have had enough of him,' said the Warden.

'Ay, faith, we have had enough of him,' said Dickie.

'It is perhaps from Master Michael Scott,' said Yardbire: 'Or maybe himsel, wha kens. Lord sauff us!'

'D'ye think sae?' said the Warden, starting to his feet: 'That would indeed alter the case!'

'Ay, that would alter the case indeed!' said Dickie, starting to his.

'Who is he? or what is he like?' enquired the Warden.

'Ay, that is the principal thing to be attended to,' said Dickie; 'What is he like?'

'He is delivered as a knight of most noble bearing and courtly deportment,' answered the knight in waiting.

'I suppose we must admit him, and hear what he has to say,' said the Warden, again taking his seat.

'O yes. By all means. Let us hear what he has to say,' said Dickie, sitting down likewise.

As the courtly and athletic form of the Lord Douglas came up the hovel, the Border gentlemen stood all up to receive him, save Sir Ringan, who throwing himself back on his seat, leaned his chin on his hand, and in that indifferent posture awaited till the quality of his guest was made manifest.

But no sooner did the voice of Douglas reach his ear, than he rose up to salute and receive him with as much ease as if he had been his daily visitor.

‘You are hard of admission, noble Sir Ringan,’ said he, ‘thus to let your friends wait at the door of your pavilion, after riding so far in the dark to see you.’

‘I am chafed with visitors from both countries every hour of the day, Lord Douglas; many of them coming with complaints which it is out of my power to rectify. I have therefore a sly inquisition established around me, that might haply give your Lordship some interruption. But it was your own blame. Had you announced the name of Douglas, that would have opened a lane for you from my farthest outpost to this chair, which I request you to occupy, while I take my place here at your right hand. You are welcome, noble Earl of Douglas and Mar, to our rude habitation. There is no man more so, beneath our sovereign lord the King. I give you and your attendants all kind welcome and greeting.’

‘You are become as much an accomplished courtier among these wild wastes as you were before an accomplished warrior, Sir Ringan,’ said Douglas.

‘I always make points of speaking as I am spoken to, drinking as I am drunk to, and going to a battle when sent for,’ said the Warden. ‘H’m h’m h’m,’ neighed Dickie o’ Dryhope, screwing up his mouth on one side like a shrew: ‘It is all true our Captain tells you, Lord Douglas. That’s his rule. Mh? mh? Mh? H’m h’m h’m.’ The Douglas cast at Dickie a curious searching glance from his dark eye that was half hid by a shaggy eyebrow; and then turning to Sir Ringan, replied, ‘I am heartily glad of it, noble Baron of Mountcomyn, it having been for that very purpose I sought this interview with you. Sir Ringan Redhough, you must to battle with me to-morrow.’

‘With all my heart, my lord,’ was the reply.

‘Come, that is as it should be. We’ll no more of it. We *can* have no more of it,’ said Douglas: ‘Let us have a flaggon of your best wine to drink success to our arms.’

The wine was soon produced, with plenty of other good cheer, with which the Warden’s camp was then abundantly stored; and the two chiefs conversed together with as much freedom, and as little apparent jealousy with regard to rank or fame, as if they had been two brothers. The Douglas

delineated his affairs as in that posture in which success could not fail him; at the same time he admitted the ticklish situation in which he stood, owing to the diversion made by the captain of Berwick, and that without an instant effort he would be inclosed between two fires. Sir Ringan answered, that he had heard of the incursion, and therefore he had drawn his troops down from the dales of Northumberland to support his friend and firm ally in any case of necessity; and he concluded by boldly proffering either to supply the Douglas's place in the blockade, or march to the west, and hold Sir Thomas Musgrave in check. Douglas was delighted to find the crabbed, cross-grained Warden, as he was wont to call him, in such a complaisant humour; and testified that delight by many well-turned compliments and encomiums on his vigilance and gallant support. He got introduced to all the gentlemen of the party, with whom he exchanged civilities, desiring them all to regard him as their friend, and one ready to do them a kindness whenever it lay in his power. 'And now, Sir Ringan, since you hold the taking of the castle of Roxburgh so light,' said he, 'I think it is meet that my men and I should march and give battle to Musgrave. Probably you may have taken possession of that troublesome garrison before we return.'

'If I do, my Lord of Douglas, I take it for myself,' replied Sir Ringan; 'and claim all the privileges, rights, and immunities that were to devolve on you as the reducer of it. Now, if I should take the castle of Roxburgh before your return, I suspect you would find it as hard work to expel me, and these Border warriors of mine, as the half-starved English that you have there already. I have all these brave fellows to hold in beef and malt, my Lord of Douglas; and for their sakes I have laid down a golden rule to walk by, which is, *To do nothing for nothing*. If I take the castle of Roxburgh, I take it for myself and them.'

Douglas, who knew nothing of the prophecy and injunctions from the book of the destinies of men, became more convinced than ever, that the Warden knew of some flaw or some tangible point in the garrison; and if there existed a knowledge of such a thing, he resolved to avail himself of it by any means. He knew Sir Ringan too well to suppose he would confide his secret to him, without a certainty of reaping due advantage; and that, therefore, it behoved to give him a prevailing interest in it. With this view, he answered him, jocularly: 'Though you were to receive all that was

promised to me, in the event of my success, you would probably find yourself only a loser by the guerdon.'

'Why, are you not to be made the king's son-in-law?' replied Sir Ringan 'and thereby the first subject, or rather the first man of the realm; for, by the indolence and retired habits of our sovereign, you would have the whole kingdom at your beck. Call you this nothing, my Lord? Or would it be fair and reasonable – supposing the thing possible, which I do not pretend to say it is – that if my warriors and I should put you in possession of all this power, riches, and honours, would it be fair, I say, that we should be again turned out to these Border wastes, to live by our shifts, without reaping any thing of the benefit?'

'Should you take the castle for me, in my absence, noble Sir Ringan, your reward shall be of your own naming.'

'Would it not be better, Lord Douglas, that the reward were settled before-hand; and, then, I lose or gain at my own risk and peril. If I deliver you no produce, I ask no pay.'

'And what is the reward Sir Ringan would ask for such a piece of incalculable service?'

'My choice of seven baronies on the West Border, to divide amongst these gentlemen commoners, to whose support I owe every thing.'

'You are a master worth serving, brave Sir Ringan. But such a grant would break my power on the Border for ever.'

'It is that your power on the Border *may not* be broken for ever, Lord Douglas, that I make the proffer. I am safer without the venture. But you are a day's march nearer to the English army – draw off your men silently before the break of day, and march against it. I shall supply your place at the blockade, to the west of the castle, without loss of time, and answer to you at your return for all ingress or egress that takes place in that division. If Sir Thomas proves hard for you, you have only to keep your men together, and fall back toward the entrenchments. You shall find you have some good back-friends there.'

Douglas had determined on no account to let this proffer of the Warden's ingenious head and powerful arm in the taking of the fortress pass without trial; so, without more ado, he called for the friar's tablets, and made out a grant to Sir Ringan, in free present, of the barony and lands of Gilterscleuch, and his choice of seven of the best baronies belonging to the

house of Douglas in the districts adjoining to the West Border, in the event of his putting James, Lord of Douglas and Mar, in full possession of the castle of Roxburgh. This grant signed and sealed, the Douglas departed, after pledging the Warden and his friends in a hearty stirrup cup, both chiefs being alike well pleased with the agreement they had entered into. The Douglas posted back to Roxburgh, and reached it just in time to put the western division of his army in motion at break of day; while Sir Ringan made his musters by the light of the moon, and marched off to the siege of Roxburgh.

CHAPTER 27

Aboon his skins he sat and rockit,
And fiercely up his bonnet cockit;
Then at ha' doors he crousely knockit
  Withouten dread,
Till wives and bairns around him flockit,
  But now he's dead.

Then he wad claw, and he wad hustle,
Till all the skins played rap and rustle;
While up his thighs, wi' devilish bustle,
  Ran mony a ked;
Now they hae lost their gume and gustle,
  Sin' Robin's dead.

De'il on the yaud, that I should ban!
That brak the neck of sic ane man;
Now wha will wucked dames traupan
  Wi' siccan speed?
Or drive the hides to them wha tan,
  Sin' Robin's dead?

Rob Paterson's Elegy

On the same day that Douglas marched his men up the Tweed towards Melrose, and the Warden his troopers across the Border to the siege of Roxburgh, a band of twelve men and thirty horses came up out of Eskdale towards Craik-Cross, the most motely group that had ever been seen traversing that wild country. The men were dressed as English peasants of the lowest order, with broad unshapely hats, made of a rude felt of wool and hair mixed; wide coarse jockeycoats that came below their knees; and, instead of loops or buttons, these were bound round the middle with a broad buff-belt; the rest of their dress was all conformable, save that each of them had a noble broad-sword girded by his side. Some of their horses were loaden, some of them half-loaden, and a few had scarcely any thing on their

backs at all. But no man will guess what that loading consisted of. Not to keep the reader in suspense, it was of *nolt-hides*; that is, of cow-hides, oxen-hides, bull-hides, and all sorts of hides that ever came from the backs of cattle. There were raw hides and dried hides, black hides and white hides, hides with horns, and hides without horns; and of these consisted their loading, and nothing else.

The men alighted at Craik-Cross to bait their horses, and the following conversation ensued, which will let the reader into the secret who these skin-dealers were, thus strangely accoutred.

'Will Laidlaw o' Craik, ye're a gayan auld-farrant chield. Come near me, and sit down, and tell me gin ye can hae ony guess what our master the Warden can be wanting wi' a' thir confoundit ill-smelled hides?'

'I hae puzzled my brain to nae purpose about it, Dan Chisholm; but am convinced it is some way connected wi' the siege of that unlucky castle; and the maist part o' us trows that they are for making raip-ladders, or rather whing-ladders, for climbing ower the wa's; an gin that be the case, Dan, there will mony ane o' us throw away our lives to little purpose.'

'Now to hear you talk about fock throwing away their lives! You that wad risk your life for naething but a broken crown every day o' the year. Why, Will Laidlaw, I hae foughten often in the same field wi' you afore this time, and I never saw you set your life at a cow's horn, let be the hide o' ane (for whilk we wad gie a good deal the day.) I hae seen ye ride from your ain party, when that wing wasna hotly enough engaged, and blatter into the very thickest and hettest part o' the field, just girning and laying on like some lang-nosed deil come out o' the pit. But let me tell ye, Will o' Craik, it is a sair fault o' yours, and it is a clagg o' the hale clan – the deil be your landlord, (as he has already been mine, quietly,) gin the hale tott o' ye be nae ill for saying ae thing an' thinking another. If ane hear a Laidlaw complaining o' pinching and poverty, ye may amaist be sure that he has the best stockit mailings, and the best filled beef-barrels in the country. If ye hear him complaining, that the English are herrying the Scots up, stoop and roop, ye may rely on it the Scots hae been getting the upper hand and enriching themsels; and if ye hear a Laidlaw pretending to be averse to a foray or a battle, ye may depend on it that his very knuckles are itching, and his teeth watering, to be at it –. Na, ye needna waul wi' your muckle een, Will, for ye canna deny the thing; and it is a d—n'd provoking gate ye hae.'

‘Hout, dear Dan! we just hae it by kind to try what fock thinks on the subject a wee; to sound them like, afore we tell our hale minds. But a’ comes aye freely out ere the hinder-end. But the truth is, about this that we were cracking; ye ken I dinna mind a bodle what the Warden be gaun to do wi’ the skins, provided he keep his promise, and gie me a living English cow for the hides of every three dead anes that I bring him.’

‘There it goes now! There you go again! Weel I ken ye carena ae doit about the kye. Ye hae plenty o’ baith kye and ewes already, and, on the contrary, ye wad *gi’e them a’* to ken what our chief is gaun to be about wi’ thir hides. But it is needless to fight w’ye! Ye canna help that cross gate o’ expressing yoursel. Gin ever ye be drowned we may seek you up the water. There’s ae thing, Will – ye may see the Warden means some general good to us a’ by this project, whatever it is, for he has sent ae man o’ every name to gather up the skins o’ his native district. Ae Oliver, ae Armstrong, ae Laidlaw, ae Chisholm, and twa o’ the Redhoughs; for ye ken he is always maist behadden to his ain name. But what can be the meaning o’ this ugly disguise, I canna form a single conjecture; and he is sae strick about it too, that if ane o’ us let oursels be found out, we lose a’ chance of reward or advantage. Sae, Will, ye’re unco weel kend about Craik and Howpasley, and a’ the links o’ Borthwick, and so am I about Castle-Wearie and Chisholm, and thereabouts. Gang ye into my father’s house a’night, and I’ll gang to Craik; gather ye up the hides o’ Teviot, and I shall take Borthwick in my road. My father will maybe be a wee sweer to take ye in, but ye maun make your way on him the best gate ye can; he has the best stockit pantry on Teviot head, but a bit of a Laidlaw’s fault, complaining aye maist when he has least reason. He has a capital stock o’ hides, but seeing that English disguise he may deny them; therefore try him first, and if he winna produce them, gang up the burn about half a mile, and in a lown crook, weel hidden frae a’ the world, ye’ll find a bit housie wi’ a dozen o’ good hides in it. If he winna gi’e you them at a fair price, ye maun e’en take them for naething, as it is a’ for his ain advantage.’

‘Na, na, Dan. Weel I wat I’ll do nae sic thing! I wadna dispute wi’ the auld man, nor anger him for a’ the hides in the hale barony.’

‘There again! Aye the auld man! Now, the Lord forgi’e ye; for ye never met wi’ him a’ your life but ye baith angered him and disputed wi’ him. But nae mair about it. Take ye Sandy Pot o’ the Burnfit, the queer hairum

skairum devil, Tam Oliver, Bauldy Elliot, and Bauldy Armstrong wi' you; and I'll take Jamie Telfer o' the Dodhead, Jock o' the Delorrin, Jock Anderson o' nae place, and Geordie Bryden o' every place, wi' me – and good luck to the skin trade!'

It was one of those sort of winter days that often occur in January, when the weather is what the shepherds call 'in the deadthraw,' that is, in a struggle between frost and thaw. There was a dark cloud of rime resting on the tops of the hills, which shrouded them in a veil impervious to vision beyond the space of a few yards, and within that cloud the whole height appeared to be covered with millions of razors, every pile of bent and heath being loaded with ice on the one side, so that each had the exact resemblance to a razor blade, all of which appeared to be cast in the same mould, and of the same beautiful metal. The feet of the horses as they travelled through this made a jingling noise, as if they had been wading among crystal. As they came lower down on the hills the air became softer, and the ground was free of those ice-candles; but an uncommon gloom hung over holm and dale.

Old Peter Chisholm was walking on the green to the westward of his house, looking at his ewes coming bleating down from among the dark foldings of the rime, and saying to himself, 'I wonder what can be word o' thae dirty herd callants the day, that they are letting the sheep come a' stringing in lang raws, and rairing and bleating, into the how o' the water that gate. The country's in a loose state e'now, for the strength is a' out o't; a raid o' thirty stout English thieves wad herry the hale water. An sic were to come this gate the day, my stock wad be a' gane.'

Peter was proud of his ewes for all that, and, giving them a whistle, he threw the plaid over his shoulder, set his broad bonnet up before, and turned about to go home to look after the shepherd lads. As he turned his face to the north, he naturally cast his eye up toward the Limycleuch hills, where it instantly embraced the appalling sight of Will Laidlaw o' Craik, and his disguised compeers, with their fifteen horses, coming stretching down the ridge, right opposite to Pate Chisholm's hirsel of bonny wheel-horned ewes. The old man's eyes were dazzled in his head, and a paralytic affection seized his whole frame. 'Lord pity us! Now see what's coming yonder,' said Peter: 'I tauld them aye what wad happen! but no ane wad heed me! O dool to the day! A man may soon hae muckle, and soon hae naething in this

wearifu' country. O Dan, Simon, and Jock, the strength o' my house! wherefore are ye a' gane and left your gear to gang as it came! Dear bought! far sought! and little for the haudding.'

By the time Peter got thus far with his soliloquy he was quite out of breath; for he was not only walking fast, but he was absolutely running towards home, with a sore stoop, and knees bent much forward. Still as he hobbled he continued to apostrophise in short sentences, as he could gather a little breath now and then to utter a small portion of the concatenation of repulsive ideas that presented themselves one after another – 'Naething but trash left – Heh-heh – Rob-in-Laid-law! – I hae seen – Heh-heh the – day, but – Heh – that's – gane – Lasses, too! – Hoh – oh! – O ay! – Half – breed – bring – up – Oh – Dan – Dan, &c. &c. Daughter! Bessy Chisholm – Heh! Are ye therein? May Chisholm – where's your titty? Poor tafferel ruined tawpies! What are ye gaun gaindering about that gate for, as ye didna ken whilk end o' ye were uppermost?' 'That's easily kend, father. What has come ower ye? Hae ye seen a warlock that ye are gaping and glowring at sic a dismal rate?' 'War than ony warlock, ye twa glaikit idle hizzies. Off wi' jerkin and wilycoat, and on wi' doublet, breeks, and buskins instantly. Belt on bow, buckler, and brand, and stand for life, limb, gear, and maidhood, or a's gane in ae kink. O dool be to the day! dool be to the day! What are ye standing glinting, and looking at ane anither there for? Cast your een up to the Carlin-rigg, and see what's coming. A'harried! ravaged! and murdered! Come, come: Don your billies' claes; let us make some show; it will maybe save something. Warn the herd callants; let the stoutest of them arm, and the weakest rin and drive sheep and cattle an' a' out o' sight amang the clouds. O dool to the day! Na, na; for a' the houses that are in the country here they come straight! Nae winning by this place.'

The lasses seeing their father in such a querulous mood, and the motely troop fast approaching, acquiesced in his mandate, and without delay mounted themselves each in a suit of their younger brother's clothes, while old Peter stood over them to see that they put all to rights, always giving such directions as these: 'Come, come, come! strap, clasp, belt and buckle; and gude-sake fauld up your cuffs. Your arms hing at your shoulder blades as they were off joint. Hout fie! hout fie! Wha ever saw young chields hae sic luchts o' yellow hair hingin fleeing in the wind? Come, come, strap and string down; swaddle it round wi' sax dizzen o' wheelbands, and fasten a

steel-belted fur cap ower aboon a'. Yare, yare! Lord sauff us! Here they come! What's to be our fate? Keep close for a wee while.'

'Hilloa! Wha hauds the house!' was vollied from the door by the deep-toned voice of Will Laidlaw.

'There's nae body in but me, and I downa come to the door. Ye had better ride on,' cried old Peter, in a weak tremulous voice.

'Wilt thou answer to thy name, or hast thou a name to answer to?' said Will, feigning to speak the broad Northumberland dialect, which sorted very ill with his tongue: 'An thou be'st leel man and true, coome and bid thee guests wailcome. It is God speed, or spulzie wi' thee in three handclaps.'

'Spulzie, quo the man!' exclaimed Peter: 'The muckle fiend spulzie the unmannerly gab that spake it!' – and with that he came stooping over his staff, and coughing to the door, speaking in a quavering treble key. 'A bonny like purpose! What wad ye spulzie frae a poor auld man that hasna as muckle atween him and the grave as will pay for howking it, and buy a hagabag winding sheet? Spulzie, quo he! That is a good joke! – he – he – he, (cough) hoh – hoh – hoh. I'm sae ill wi' that host! Eh? wha hae we a' here? Strangers, I think!'

'Goodman, we were directed to your house for a night's entertainment or two, if you are the old rich yeoman ycleped Patrick Chisholm of Castle-Weary.'

'Na, na! I'm nae rich yeoman! I'm naething but a poor herried, forsaken, reduced auld man! I hae nae up-putting for ought better than a flea. Ye had better ride on down to Commonside. There's plenty there baith for man and horse. Come away. I'll set you down the length o' the ford, and let ye see the right gate.'

'Come neighbours, let us go away as he says. We'll never make our quarters good on this auld carle,' said Sandy Pot, in a whisper to his companions: 'And troth do ye ken I wad rather lie at the back of the dike, before I imposed myself on ony body. Od my heart's wae for the poor auld niggard.'

'Come away, lads, come away,' cried Peter. 'The days are unco short e'now; ye haena time to put off.'

'Stop short there, my good fellow,' cried Laidlaw, 'We have some other fish to fry with you before we go. I am informed you have a large stock in

hand of the goods in which we deal. You have had lucky lifts this year. Plenty of good hides with you?'

'Rank misprision, and base rascally jests on a poor auld man. Not a single hide about the hale town, foreby the ane on my back,' cried old Peter.

'My orders are, worthy old yeoman, to give fair prices to such as produce their hides,' said Laidlaw. 'But whoever refuses, I am obliged to search for them; and if I find any I take them at my own price.'

'O dear, honest gentleman, I downa joke wi' ye: hoh, hoh,' coughed Peter. 'Gin ye be for a place to stay in a' night, come away as lang as it is daylight.'

'Why, with your leave my good fellow, we must lodge with you tonight. Hearth-room and ha'-room, steed-room and sta'-room, is the friendly stranger's right here. Small things will serve: a stone of English beef or so, and two or three pecks of oats.'

'Beef, quoth the man? Ye may as weel look for a white corby as beef in my pantry, or aits in my barn. Will ye no come away?'

'Not till I make a search for your nolt hides, honest yeoman. To that am I bound.'

The four skin-dealers next the door alighted and went in, leaving their horses with the other two, who went and put them up in a good large stable with plenty of stalls. Peter ran back to the house in perfect agony, speaking to himself all the way. 'They are very misleared chaps thae. They maun surely either be Low Dutch, or else sutors o' Selkirk, that they are sae mad about skins. I little wat how I am to get rid o' them.'

The two lasses appeared armed cap-a-pee like two young men; and though Bess was Will Laidlaw's own sweetheart, he did not recognize her through the disguise, neither did she once suspect him. The two made a little swaggering about the *pelt-dealers* as they called them entering the pantry, but not choosing to measure arms with them, the weak suffered the strong to pass; and Will having his cue, soon discovered the huge barrels of beef below the ground, with empty ones above them. Old Peter shed tears of vexation when he saw this huge and highly-valued store was all discovered, but had not a word to say for himself, save now and then 'A' fairly come by, and hardly won; and there is nae right nor law that says honest men should be eaten up wi' sorners. May ane speir where ye come frae, or by wha's right ye do this!'

‘Why man dost thou no hear and dost thou no see that we’re coome joost from Nworthoomberland!’

‘Aha!’ thought Peter to himself; ‘English thieves after a! I had some hopes that I could distinguish Scots tongues in their heads. But a’s gane, a’s gane!’

‘Now auld yeoman, if thou hast a word of trooth in thee, tell us where the hides are, and we will pay thee for them.’

‘No ae hide about the town. No ane, either little or muckle.’

‘Why soore am I them coos doodnae coome to thee withoot heydes, did they? That I can answer for, they had a’ heydes and bonns baith when they came from hwome.’

‘Waur than ever! Waur than ever!’ exclaimed Pate Chisholm to himself as he sought another apartment: ‘The very men that the kye were reaved frae come to take revenge! Callant, come here and speak wi’ me. Haste to a neighbour’s house, and raise the fray. We shall never be a’ quietly put down wi’ half a dozen.’

‘Dearest father,’ said May, ‘I dinna think the men mean ony ill, if ye wad be but civil.’

‘Civil or no civil, wench, it is as good to have half a dozen armed men lying concealed near us,’ said Peter: ‘An we dinna need them, the better. Rin your ways, and gar raise a’ the auld men and the young lads in the two neist towns, for there is nae ither left. Pith’s good in a’ play.’

The maid did as she was ordered, and Peter, seeing that no better would be, tried to compel himself to a sort of civility, which, however, sat on him with a very bad grace. But, hides! hides! – nothing but hides was the burden of their enquiries; while Peter durst not for his life produce the hides, deeming that every man would know the hides of his own kine, and wreak tenfold vengeance on himself and household. He knew not, he said, what his son Dan, who took care of all these matters, had made of them – sold them he supposed to the curriers and sutors of Selkirk – and more than this Pate would not acknowledge. There was no other thing for it, nor perhaps did Laidlaw want any thing else, than for him and his companions to walk up the burn and make a seizure of the whole of Peter’s excellent hides, with which they returned loaden to his dwelling. His confusion and distress of mind were most appalling when Laidlaw spread them all out before him, and asked in a very particular manner to be informed where he had got

them. O! Peter knew nothing about them. They were not his at all. He did not know to whom they belonged. But he would not stand to speak, turning his back always on the men, and hasting away, coughing and speaking to himself. He could have seen these presumptuous skin-men roasted on a brander, for they had now put him out of all patience, and all hope!

'Pray thee now, mine good friend, inform me this,' said Laidlaw; 'Did'st thou nwot get this seame fleckered one, and this brwoad one here, on the third of the last mwonth; and here's wother three, did'st thou nwo get them on the twentieth of the seame mwonth? Now tell me this I say? Why where is thou gwoing groombling inte theesel? Turn about thee feace to the heydes, and answer to the pwoint.'

'Aff hands is fair play,' said old Pate: 'I winna be forced wi' ony unmannerly English lown that ever I saw atween the een;' and with that he heaved his staff and struck Laidlaw across the shoulders, and over the steel bonnet repeatedly, who was like to burst with repressed laughter, but still persisted in his queries.

'What ails the owld catwiddied carle,' said he, 'that he winno answer a ceevil question? I's jwost wanting to tauk to thee aboot boosiness, and thou flees out in a reage and breaks me head. Come tourn again, and tell me when and where thou got'st this one, see, this wheyte one here! What's 't moombling at? Wolt thou tell me the price of them, then?'

'I want to hae naething to do wi' you, and as little to say to you; therefore, gang about your business, and dinna plague a poor auld unfeiroch man. The gate is afore ye, and your company's wanted elsewhere.'

Will would take none of those hints; he followed his uncourteous host about and about, till at last he fairly holded him beyond the fire; and then he took his seat over against him and conversed on, while his companions dropped in one by one and joined in it. For a while they got it all to themselves, but at length Pate, not being able to make better of it, suffered himself to be drawn in by degrees to join them, still preserving the same strain of disingeniousness. They asked who the two handsome striplings were that attended him, and spread the board with provisions? He answered that they were two sons of his own. 'Sons of thine?' said Laidlaw, 'Whoy, what are their neames?' 'Simon and John,' answered he; 'or rather Sim and Jock, for that's how we ca' them.'

‘Whoy, mon, that is the queerest thing I ever heard,’ said Laidlaw: ‘Then thou hast two swons of the neame of Jock, and other two of the neame of Sim, for I saw two of that neame, strapping youths, in the Warden’s camp.’

Peter wist not well what answer to make; and, therefore, only added, ‘Ay, Ay! Were you in the Warden’s camp? Then tell me, is their ony word frae my son Dan?’

‘Ay man, I can tell thee sic news of Dan as thou never heard’st; he has sitten at his supper hand and neive wi’ the deil.’ At these words one of the young men behind them (May Chisholm to wit,) uttered a suppressed scream, and from that moment Will Laidlaw smelled a rat, and soon discovered his own beloved Bess Chisholm standing gazing at him as he related the wonderful story of her brother’s adventures with the devil, the warlock, and the three evil spirits; of his race with those infernals along the marble pavement of the air; his transformation into a horned beast; and of his eating and drinking with the prince of darkness. But the two striplings were most of all shocked at hearing of the devil’s burning stomach, and how the wine *fizzed* as it went down.

After listening and wondering while all these things were in relation, Bess said to the skin-dealer next to her, who chanced to be Sandy Pot, ‘Pray, Sir, when you were in the camp of Sir Ringan Redhough, did you note a brave trooper, a friend of ours, named Laidlaw?’

‘Oh, yes, that I did,’ said Sandy: ‘I know him well.’ This was a glorious joke for Pot, and his comrades were afraid he would persevere in it till he put their secret out altogether.

‘How is he reported in the army?’ said she: ‘Is it still alleged that he is the bravest and most successful battler in the baron’s array?’

‘*Bottler*, I suppose you mean,’ said Sandy, ‘for as to his battling, God mend that. He is not noted for ought that I ever heard of, except for keeping a flunkey, or a wall-i’-the-chamber, as the Frenchmen ca’ it; and it is reported thro’ all the army, that that *wally* o’ his is an English girl. I can tell you that your neighbour, Will Laidlaw, is notorious for nothing else beside this.’

‘It is false as thyself, and thy perjured ungenerous nation,’ said the disguised maiden. ‘I know my friend to be honour’s self, and of a house whose courage and integrity were never called in question. The man that dares to slander him had better do it somewhere else than in my presence,

and under my father's roof. But I degraded him myself, by putting his name into the mouth of such a mean forager as thou art! The man whose actions are base, always accuses the brave and generous of deeds such as his own.'

'Bless me, what ails the chiel?' said Sandy, laughing good humouredly: – 'What's the great ill o' keeping *a wally*? I aince keepit ane mysel, there's nae doubt o't, till my uncle, Gideon Scott, set up his birse, and gart me part wi' the creature.'

The rest laughed at Sandy being put out of countenance by the indignant stripling; but Bessy Chisholm turned on her heel, and walked out at the door, muttering expressions about vulgarity, raw hides, and maggots; and Will Laidlaw, not able to contain himself, rose and walked out after her, in a visible state of mental agitation. As he approached the stable door quietly, into which she had turned, he heard her saying to herself. 'Laidlaw keep an English mistress in disguise! No, the fellow is a poltroon, and a liar, and I will not believe it.' Will entering at that moment, seized her hand between both his, and kissed it, saying, in a passionate style, 'My own dear and high-spirited Bess Chisholm still!'

Never was there seen such a statue of amazement! The tones of the voice, now uttered in its natural key, were familiar to her. But the figure that uttered them! To be addressed in that style by a great burly thief of an English skin-buyer, outwent all comprehension. She was in a man's dress, be it remembered – and there she stood, with her face half raised, her ruddy lips wide apart, and her set eyes of lucent blue showing a mixture of astonishment and disdain. 'What? what? Sir,' was all that she could say, until the ragamuffin figure reminded her of the weaponshaw at Mountcomyn, and some love-tokens and vows, of which none knew save one. But, with a woman's natural caprice, she now was angry at him in turn having discovered her true sentiments, and refused to acknowledge him as her lover in that hateful disguise, unless the meaning of it was explained to her. He told her, that the meaning of it was unknown to himself; that he took it at his captain's command; but that his fortune depended on the secret being kept.

'There you are safe, at all events,' said she; 'and it is well you have disclosed yourself in time, for my father has raised the country, and it is not improbable that, before to-morrow, you should have been all dead men.'

‘I think we have been in greater jeopardies,’ said he: ‘But in the mean time keep up your disguise, that my comrades may not discover your sex; – and we two must have some private discourse during the night, for I have much to say to you.’

‘Not I, master, I winna court ae word wi’ a man in the dress of a vulgar English boor; for it is sae hatefu’ to me, I can like nought that’s within it. Ah me! I wot ill how it is; but I think I hardly detest it sae sair already.’

‘My bonny, haughty, pawkie, sweet Elizabeth!’ cried Laidlaw –. But Isaac the curate says, that, being himself a married man, he could not go on with all the overcharged outrageous stuff that passed between these two fond lovers; so he passes it over, as well as the conversation at their evening meal, which Bess took care to make a plentiful and savoury one; and in the mean time, she was in such high spirits herself, that the troopers, who did not know her, took the young man for the most swaggering puppy they had ever seen. She challenged Sandy Pot to fight her with single rapier, knowing well that Laidlaw would find some means of preventing it; but it was evident that old Peter thought her entirely out of her senses, for he tried to get her away from about the house to the residence of one of the neighbouring gentlemen yeomen for the night, but the experiment was vain.

When he saw such a goodly supper, or dinner, (for they were both in one) set down to these uncouth, and, to him, unwelcome guests, he could not contain his chagrin, and at first refused to turn out to the board, or partake with the rest. But when he saw that the good fare would all go, he grew as restless as if he had been sitting on pins, till Bess, who knew his way, took him by the arm, and pretended to force him jocularly out to the table. But Peter was not ill to force; for in place of receding, he made all the haste into the head of the board that he could, though at the same time always repeating, ‘I tell ye, callant, it is downright wastery.’ He, however, plied as good a knife and as good a horn-spoon as any of them all.

While they were yet busily engaged at their meal, the tramp of horses was heard approaching the door in a cautious and uncertain manner, and by a circuitous way. The two disguised maids, (whom, by-the-by, we should distinguish by the names of Sim and Jock, as they sustained these that night,) were standing eating at the hall-dresser, behind the backs of the troopers; and when the trampling was first heard, Jock grew as pale as death, but Sim, who knew what guests were within, which the other did not

know, shewed a courage so undaunted, that it appeared wonderful to all present, save one, but to Jock in particular: ‘O ho! The nearer night the mae beggars,’ cried Sim. ‘Who have we next?’

‘That beats ought I ever heard in my life!’ exclaimed Pate: ‘I think the fock be gane distractedly mad! What brings them a’ here? Is there no another ha’ house and pantry in the hale country but mine? It is hard to be eaten out o’ house and hald wi’ sorners and stravaegers this gate. May Liberton’s luck befa’ the hale o’ them. Callant Jock, set by that meat out o’ sight.’ ‘Stop for a wee bit, an ye like, goodman,’ said Bauldy Armstrong: ‘It is best aye to do ae thing afore another.’

By this time the dialogue had commenced in the court; Simmy went briskly to the door by himself, and demanded of the strangers who they were, and what they wanted? They answered, with hesitation, that they supposed they had lost their way, and requested to know who held the house, and how it was called? ‘The house is held by my father, a leel Scottish yeoman,’ said the youth; ‘and already full of strangers to the door, as well as every stall of his stable with their horses. Pass on your way, and peace be with you.’

‘Did I not tell you we had *lost* our way,’ said the first speaker, riding up to the door. ‘Pray, who are the strangers within? We have lost a party of our friends.’

‘The men are from the south, master: free-traders, they may be called. Men of horns, hides, and hair, Sir. You, I suppose, are of the same profession?’

‘Precisely of the same,’ said the stranger, alighting from his horse, and entering the house.

He was followed by other two, for there were but four in all, and the fourth was a boy whom they left holding their horses. When they came in upon Peter and his jolly hide-merchants, they were visibly disappointed, and viewed the grotesque-looking group with marked curiosity. These were not the men they expected to have found, that was evident; but perceiving their English habits, they ventured to address them. They were answered in blunt cutting terms; for our troopers knew them, although the disguise prevented their being known again. Having learned the name of the house and its owner, they began forthwith to inquire if any thing of a young nobleman had been seen at that place, with such and such attendants; for

they had traced them to that very house, they said, and if the possessors could give no account of them they would be held as responsible. Old Peter said, there were so many people came to that house, that it was impossible he could tell a tale of one of them distinct from another; but the intrepid Sim, knowing his back friends, told him the whole story in a few words, and then asked them in turn what they had to say concerning it.

'Whoy, I has joost to say this, young chap, that I am to boond thee and all the faymilie, and carry you all to answer before a meeting of the wardens.'

'Ay, and it is prwoper reyght and prwoper reason too, that they should, friend,' said Laidlaw, pretending to take his part, to see what he would say. Will knew the three men to be three notorious English thieves, of the set of the Halls and Reids, and that they could not, in fact, be sent in search of the Lady Jane Howard; but he could not divine their motive for coming there, or making the inquiry; therefore he took the Northumberland tongue as well as he could, and encouraged them in conversation till a late hour. Yet he could learn nothing; only he was sure they were come about no good end. As for old Peter, when he saw two parties of Englishmen come upon him, and heard that they laid their heads together, he gave himself and all that he had up for lost; and hoping to conciliate their favour in some measure, he actually intreated these last comers to sit down and share of the remnants of their supper, which they did in a right liberal manner, while Peter went out and in to learn the news. He found by this time nine men, well armed, assembled in the barn, that had gathered from the neighbouring houses, whose inhabitants were all bound to rise and assist one another on any emergency. These were mostly old men or very young ones, the flower of the Border districts being all in the Warden's camp. Will likewise informed his sweetheart privately of his suspicions; and perceiving that the strangers were extremely well mounted, and heavily armed, he desired her, if possible, to find means of concealing their horses. This the supposed Sim soon effected. The boy still held them at forage by the side of the old castle-wall; and he being brought in, and set down to supper, some of those in the barn were warned to take the horses quietly to the concealed house up in the hollow burn. They were soon secured there; and the thieves perceiving that no one left the house, never had the smallest suspicion of any trick, the boy being fast asleep behind the board. At length all of them grew drowsy, and began to compose themselves to rest as they best could, save two fond

lovers, that were whispering their vows and their secrets to each other in the little chamber mentioned in a former part of this history.

About midnight, when all was quiet, these two heard the cry of *Welhee! Welhee!* from a neighbouring mountain, which in a short time was returned from two different places in the valley.

'Now, I will lay my neck in wad,' whispered Will to his sweetheart, 'that there is a thief-raid to-night; and that these three have either come here to watch you, or to cut your throats in case of resistance; or perhaps they may have indeed lost their party in the mist. But this I ken, neither a Reid nor a Hall ever came thus far into Scotland for good. If the fray rise, take you the command, and fear nothing. My friends and I will defend you, and clear your way.'

'But what shall we do, dear Laidlaw, with these three mosstroopers and the boy?'

'We must either slay or bind them the first thing we do, or perhaps leave them to waddle to the hills in their armour on foot the best way they can.'

The maiden's heart trembled at the thoughts of what lay before her; as for old Pate, he kept going out and in like a restless spirit; and if he had not lost his daughter, and knew not where she was, he proposed to have fastened doors and windows, and burnt all the nine English-men where they lay, for he had no faith in any of them, and weened them all come for the purpose of ruining him. As he was going about preparing matters for this laudable purpose, one of the shepherd lads came with the fray, and related a dismal tale. He said, that he and his companions had driven out all the sheep and cattle to the heights among the mist, as they had been commanded; that in the course of the evening they heard many calls and whistles around them; and just as the moon rose, a band of English thieves came round them, and drove them all off towards Bilhope-head. Peter's assembled friends advised him to take the skin-men's fifteen horses, and what remained at home of his own, and ride off and try to recover the prey, without alarming his dangerous guests; but Peter was bent on fastening the doors, and burning them skin and bone, for, he said, they would never get so easily quit of them. The two anxious lovers hearing a bustle without, opened the casement, and overheard a part of these perplexed words and reasonings. Then hastening out to join counsel, they raised the fray openly. The heroic Sim flew to horse, and desired all that were friends to the Scots to follow,

while Laidlaw addressed his compeers, saying, ‘Up, lads, and let us ride; our host must not be herried while we are under his roof.’

‘No, no!’ exclaimed the thieves, all in a breath; ‘he must not be herried and we under his roof;’ and no one appeared in half such hurry as they were to mount and be gone.

‘Stop short, my good fellows, till I speak with you for a minute,’ said Laidlaw: ‘Make me sure which side you will take before you go, else one foot you stir not from that fire-side. I know you for Anthony Reid of Whickhope, and those for two of your cousins of Tersithead, and shrewdly suspect you to be at the head of the foray.’

Anthony drew his sword: so did Laidlaw. But the English troopers were bold and desperate fellows; and before Laidlaw’s friends could gather round him to his assistance, the three having covered themselves with their bucklers, forced their way out, back to back, and ran Sandy Pot through the left shoulder, who pressed on them too rashly. When they missed their horses, and saw that they were clean gone, they foamed like as many furies, and, setting their backs to the wall, swore they would fight it out. The combat might have been attended with much bloodshed, had not all the people rushed from the barn, and overpowered them. They were then taken into the house and bound, while Pot and May Chisholm, alias Jock, were left as guards on them, with orders to kill the first that should offer to loose either himself or any of his companions. This whole scene was quite beyond Peter Chisholm’s capacity. He could in nowise conceive how the one party of Englishmen assisted with such energy in detecting and binding the others. Still he was any thing but satisfied; the matter having outgone his comprehension, as well as that of all his associates, save one.

They now mounted without delay, and rode with all manner of speed toward the Pass of the Hermitage, by which path they supposed the droves must necessarily proceed; and just as they went down the Redcleuch, leading their horses, they saw the cattle passing at the foot of it. The party amounted scarcely to their own number; but the sheep-drivers were not come in view; so they mounted their horses, and instantly mixed with the men behind the drove, without offering to stop the cattle. At the same time they placed a guard of two farther behind, to prevent all intelligence from passing between the two parties. When this was effected, Simmy challenged the cattle as his father’s, and desired the drivers to give them up; but to this

the captain of the gang, whose name was Gabriel Reid, the younger brother of Anthony, and captain in his absence, only mocked, imitating the sharp treble notes of the petulant younker, and telling him that he would not give them up for three score such men as *he* was, else he was better than he looked. As he said this, however, he kept a curious eye on the rough exterior of the tall athletic English peasants by whom the youth was surrounded, which Laidlaw perceiving, accosted him in his feigned tone.

'Whoy, friend, we are countrymen of thee own, and know thee full weel. Thou's Gabriel Reid of Trochend. But thee billy Anty is taken prisoner this seame mworning, and if thou disna gie up the kie, his head will be chappit off, as weel as these of thee twa coosins the Ha's. Sae thou hast ney choice left but to yield up thee ill gotten gain.'

'And what dog art thou, that takest part against thee own countrymen?' said Reid.

'Oo, I's a dealer in the leather line, as weel as all my friends there. We have our free passages and warranty for the good of both countries; but we are honest men, and by chance were lodged in the house of the owner of these coos, and must see joostice doone to him. I boond thee brwother with mee own hands.'

'Then the devil bind thee, thou traitor knave! and for thee reward, this to thy harnpan!' said Gabriel, drawing out his sword, and attacking Laidlaw without more ado. Will, who was never backward at a brulzie, received the encounter without flinching, and, calling for fair play and elbow-room, both proceeded to decide the day by single combat, while the rest drew aloof and looked on, encouraging them only with cheers and applausive words. Laidlaw was mounted on Anthony Reid's gallant steed, which Gabriel remarked, and that added to his rancour against the skin-man at least ten degrees. The ground was exceedingly bad, so that they could not wheel for weapon-space without a parley; but neither would ask it. They fought close together, first with their sword-blades, and afterwards, as their horses came in contact, they dashed each other with their hilts. Both were slightly wounded, but Laidlaw rather had the worst of it. 'Beshrew thine heart, if thou hast been a skin-merchant all thy life,' said Gabriel, as he turned his horse in the path for another encounter. They had now changed sides, and this encounter was longer and more inveterate than the first. Laidlaw not being quite master of his mighty and furious steed, was twice in imminent

danger, losing his broad slouched hat in the struggle, the crown of which was cross-barred with steel.

Poor Sim had changed colours ten times since the combat began; and, on seeing this last struggle, he lost all command of himself, and rushed with his sword drawn to Laidlaw's rescue. *Himself*, did I say? alas, no one knew the true sex, save her lover, and no one interfered till she was met by an English trooper half-way, who unhorsed and wounded her with as much ease, of course, as she had been a child. Will's eye caught the first glance of her, as she was falling, and galloping up to the rescue, bare-headed as he was, he clove the trooper's burgonet, and slew him at the first stroke. Reid followed him up; but Laidlaw's spirit, now fully proportioned to the high mettle of his steed, was a match for any thing. He rode against his antagonist with all his fury, and having the advantage of the brae, overthrew horse and man, and galloped over them. Then throwing himself from his horse, and seizing the forlorn warrior by the throat, called out with a voice of fury – 'Rescue or no rescue?' 'No rescue! Redsdale to the fray!' was the resolute and fatal reply. Will could not stand to reason any more at that time, so, without more ado, he ran him through the body, and flew to the rescue of his beloved and heroic Elizabeth, for there the combat began to thicken. She was on her feet ere he arrived, and well guarded, and, mounting her palfrey, she bade her lover head the fray, and pay no regard to her, for she was nothing the worse. He, however, saw the blood upon her bassonet, and was roused to perfect fury. The battle now became general; but it was no regular engagement, being scattered here and there through all the drove – some fought before the cattle, some behind them, and some in the middle. It was reported, that at one time there were fifteen single combats all going on at the same instant. Therefore, to have been an engagement on a small scale, it proved a very bloody one, many being slain and wounded on both sides. But the tremendous skin-merchants bore down all before them wherever they went. These were inured to battle, while the thieving moss-troopers, as well as the hinds on the Scottish side, were only used to desultory warfare. The bare-headed leather-merchant, in particular, was a dismal sight to the forayers, for having soon rid himself of his first antagonists, he continued galloping about the field wherever he saw two engaged, and cut down all of the adverse party as he went, or rode them down, giving, with every stroke, a hard grin and a grunt. The men thought

the devil was come among them, or else that he had fairly taken possession of a skinmerchant; and, giving up the contest, a few of them tried to escape by flight, which they did by quitting their horses, and gaining some inaccessible ground. The drivers of the sheep likewise made their escape, for they found the droves deserted in the Hope. The weakest of the men having been left behind with them, they had come in view of the field of combat, and, marking how it terminated, had sped them away out of danger.

Chisholm's party brought home five prisoners with them, twelve English horses well caparisoned, and all the prey, save one ox that Will Laidlaw had ridden over and slain in the plenitude of his wrath. The Scots had no fewer than nine killed and grievously wounded out of their small party, of whom one of the latter was the brave and lovely Bess Chisholm, who was so faint, that Will was obliged to carry her all the way home on his horse before him, clasped to his bosom, he not failing to kiss her pallid cheek many a time by the way, while all the rest wondered at Laidlaw's great concern about the youth. When Peter saw his child borne into the house pale and wounded, he lost all recollection of the secret of her sex, and cried out 'O my poor Bess! my dear daughter! What had I ado making a man of thee! Thy blood is on thy old father's head. Alas, for my beloved daughter!'

'Daughter!' exclaimed they all again and again, 'Daughter!' re-echoed Will Laidlaw, as if he had not known well before. 'Daughter?' cried the skin-men: 'Have we then been led to the field by a maid? Shame on our heads that suffered the overthrow! against the rules of chivalry as her attempt was! Alas, for the gallant and high spirited young dame!'

They put her to bed, and dressed her wounds, and from all appearances had high hopes that she was more afraid and fatigued than hurt. She soon fell into a quiet slumber, in which they left her, and retired to take some refreshment, and talk over their morning's adventure. It turned out as suggested, that their three prisoners were the three chief men of the gang, who had completely lost themselves and all traces of their companions among the mist; and having heard a report of the seizure formerly made at that place, they cunningly tried to pass themselves off as messengers sent in search of the lost travellers. If they had been with their own party, that would have proved an overmatch for the Chisholms. The Reids and Halls had been herried of their whole live stock by the Warden's people, and learning that the greater part of it was driven up into these mountains, they

naturally wanted to make some reprisals and recover their own again. Had it not been for their misfortune in separating, and the exertions of the gallant hide-men, they would have effected their purpose with the utmost ease. It proved a luckless raid for them, for they lost all their horses, the greater part of their men, and the chief, squire Anthony, and six of his friends, were sent prisoners to the castle of Mountcomyn.

The country people at Chisholm's board were loud in praise of the skin-men, and of their trusty and gallant behaviour; in particular, they averred that Laidlaw had killed the half of the thieves with his own hand, for that he rode about the field like a resistless angel, destroying all before him. When Peter heard that he fought so valiantly for the recovery of his stock, and regained his darling daughter's life, his heart warmed toward him, and he bid him ask any thing he chose that was in his power to give, and he should not be said nay. Will at once asked the maid whose life he had saved for his wife. Peter hesitated, and said it was hard to bestow the flower of all the Chisholms on a English skin-merchant, a man who seemed to have neither house nor name, or was ashamed to own them. However, as he had proved himself a warrior and a hero, Peter consented, provided the maid grew better, and was herself satisfied with the match. Will said he asked her on no other terms, and went ben to see her before he departed. She was still sound asleep, or pretended to be so; therefore, unwilling to disturb her, he breathed a blessing over her, and impressed two or three warm affectionate kisses on her lips. As he came away he felt a slight pressure of her arms around his neck.

When Sandy Pot learned that the lovely youth with whom he had watched the prisoners all the night and morning of the battle was a maid, and the younger sister of his gallant friend Dan, Sandy's wound grew so ill that he could not be removed, so he remained where he was, and the other four went off with their uncouth loading. They found Dan Chisholm at Hawick waiting for them in the utmost impatience, having collected no fewer than twenty horse-loads of hides, every one of them in size like a hay-stack; and away the motely train marched and joined the Warden on the night after his arrival before the walls of Roxburgh.

CHAPTER 28

So they shot out and they shot in,
Till the morn that it was day,
When mony o' the Englishmen
About the draw-brigg lay;
When they hae yoket carts and wains,
To ca' their dead away,
And shot auld dikes aboon the lave,
In gutters where they lay.

Ball. of Old Mettlin

The expedition of the Douglas against Musgrave is, like the innumerable Border battles of that reign, only shortly mentioned by historians; and although it was a notable encounter, and is detailed by Isaac at great length, it lies out of our way here. Let it suffice that they skirmished cautiously for two days with various success, and at last came to an engagement on a field right opposite to the junction of the Tweed and Gala. After a hard fought battle, Douglas' left wing was discomfitted; and just as he was arranging his force so as to cover the retreat, an unaccountable confusion was noted among the English ranks, which seemed to be engaged anew, and with one another, there being no other army nigh. Douglas, recalling his routed squadrons, faced about, but advanced with caution, till he saw Musgrave's army broken and flying in all directions. This gallant feat was accomplished by a Sir John Gordon, who was on his way with seven hundred fresh men to the assistance of Douglas; and as he came on the English ranks behind at that important crisis, he broke them at the first onset, and took Sir Thomas Musgrave prisoner with his own hand.

Thus far the affairs of Douglas wore the aspect of prosperity – but a settled gloom hung over his mind; an oppression of spirits was apparent in every sentence that he uttered and every plan he suggested, and these were far from being traits of his wonted disposition. But the monk Benjamin had

been with him again and again! – had been harrassing his soul with commissions and messages from the mansions of the dead; and one night he heard the voice of his lost and dearly regretted princess, speaking to him in his tent, as it were out of the canvas. Still the most solemn injunctions of secrecy were imposed on him, insomuch that he deemed himself not at liberty to open his mind to any one. Besides all this, the disconsolate Mary Kirkmichael had been constantly lingering nigh to him, and always presenting herself in the utmost agony of mind, to make enquiries about her royal mistress. That lady's appearance became so terrible to him that he was unable to bear it, and gave strict charges that she should not be suffered to come within the limits of his camp. But for all that, availing herself of her rank and her sex's privilege, she forced her way to him several times, and at every visit filled his soul with the most racking torments; so that, harrassed with *war* as he was, he found this his first intercourse with *women*, attended with ten times more distracting and grievous perils than the former. While, on the other hand, the heroes that visited the castle of Aikwood, even those who escaped, not including the wretched victims who remained behind, discovered, to their dear bought experience, that there were perils in nature infinitely superior to both.

It is now absolutely necessary to shorten the curate's narrative, to prevent this work running to an inordinate length; and though two of his tales have been left out already, the great events that follow must also be related in a style abbreviated, though not mangled by indistinctness.

After the intrepid Lord Musgrave had sacrificed his own life in order to save those of his only brother and the lady of his love, Clavering was unanimously chosen captain in his room, and every soldier took a new oath to him to die in defence of the fortress. The commission of which he accepted was a dismal one; but he entered into all the feelings of the famishing inmates in their hatred of the Scots, and implacable enmity against them – therefore, he was the very man for their purpose.

Every attempt of the besiegers to scale the walls of the castle, or to gain an entrance by fraud or force, had hitherto proved utterly abortive; the determined sons of England laughed at them, regarding them in no other light than as freaks of mere insanity, or the gambols of children. The fortress was impregnable with such heroes within, had they been supplied with sufficient stores of food and of arrows, both of which had long been

exhausted; and though a small and welcome supply of the former had been obtained during the tempest and the flood which followed, for which they were obliged to the devil and Master Michael Scott, yet, like all the benefits derived from that quarter, it proved rather more hurtful than advantageous, for they devoured it with such avidity that the distemper, with which they had formerly been visited, broke out among them with greater violence than ever. Yet disregarding all these privations, which a looker-on would suppose might naturally tend to break the human heart and daunt the resolution of the boldest – with famine and pestilence both staring them in the face – they bound themselves by a new and fearful oath never to yield the fortress to the Scots while a man of them remained alive. Every new calamity acted but as a new spur to their resolution; and their food being again on the very eve of exhaustion, their whole concern was how to procure a new supply. Not that they valued their own lives or their own sufferings – these had for a good while been only a secondary consideration – but from the excruciating dread that they should die out, and the Scots attain possession of the fortress before Christmas.

The warders soon noted the alteration that had taken place in the beleaguering army. They perceived the ground that had formerly been occupied by the Angus men, and the Mar Highlanders, now taken up by the tall, atheltic, and careless looking borderers, against whom they found their antipathy was not so mortal: and they had some surmisings of what really was the case, that a strong diversion had been made in their favours, that had drawn off their inveterate and hateful enemy Douglas from the siege. Every hour convinced them farther of the truth of this suggestion; for they perceived a laxness in the manner of conducting the blockade which they had not witnessed for many days, and all their conversation turned on the manner in which they ought to avail themselves of it. The carelessness of the besiegers themselves, or something subordinate thereto, soon furnished an opportunity to them of putting their policy once more to the test, and that by an adventure the most ardently desired. On the second day after the departure of Douglas the warder on the topmost tower perceived, on a rising ground two miles to the southward, about thirty head of cattle, that came gradually in view as a wing of a large drove might be supposed to do; and after they had fed for some time there, two men came before them and chased them back out of sight of the castle, as if a great oversight had been

committed by letting them come in view of it. Notice of this important discovery was instantly given to the captain, and the news spreading among the garrison, many a long and longing look was cast from the battlements and loopholes of the high western tower that day. They were not cast in vain. Just toward the fall of evening they perceived a part of the drove appear again only a very short space from the castle, and they likewise perceived by their colours that they were a drove of English beasts which had been brought from their native pastures by the strong hand of rapine, for the supply of this new come border army. They perceived likewise that they approached the army by a concealed way, that the two glances they got of them were merely casual, and that they were very slightly guarded.

A council of war was immediately called, in which it was agreed, without one dissentient voice, that the garrison should make a sham sally at the eastern drawbridge, as if with intent to gain the city, in order that they might draw the attention of the besiegers to that point; and in the meantime the captain, with the choicest of the men were to march out by Teviot-bridge, of which the garrison had necessarily the sole possession, and endeavour to seize the prey. Thence they were to proceed westward, and try to elude the enemy's posts, or give them battle, if the former were found to be impracticable; but at all events, either to die or succeed in attaining that valuable supply, or a part of it. The success of the contest now turned on that single point as on a pivot; the balance was against them, but, that turned in their favours by an exertion of warrior prowess, they could then reckon on a complete triumph over their unappeasable foes.

Besides, every thing seemed to concur in support of their gallant expedition. The nights were dark even beyond their usual darkness at that gloomy season, and the moon did not arise till two in the morning. Both these circumstances were in their favour – the one in attaining possession of the prey unperceived, and the other in enabling them to fight their way home; for they knew that though they themselves might pass the strong Scottish posts favoured by the deep darkness, still it was impossible to bring the drove through them, and along the bridge, without a hard skirmish. The captain, therefore, gave command to the division left behind, that the more noise they heard of an engagement about the bridge of Teviot, and the gate toward the west, the more they should press their battle eastward, to divert the strength of the army to that quarter. Because on that side the Scots could

make no impression, and the English could lose nothing there save a few lives, which they accounted of small avail; but if the expedition to the west failed, their cause was finally ruined.

That was a busy evening within the walls of Roxburgh, while all was quietness and indifference without. Within there was arming and disarming, for the suits of armour that once fitted these emaciated warriors would not now hang on their frames. There was grinding of swords, pointing of spears and ox-goads, and even the houses of the fort were cleared, with a provident concern seldom overlooked by Englishmen; and at eleven o'clock at night, by the convent matin bell, Clavering, with five hundred chosen men, well armed, issued silently from the garrison, creeping along the Teviot-bridge on their hands and knees. From that they proceeded westward in the most profound silence, and so close by the Scottish posts, that they heard them breathing and conversing together. One party crept up all the way within the water-brae, and the other, led by Clavering himself, passed through between two Scottish posts, drawing themselves along the ground close on their breasts, and once or twice were obliged to squat close down, and lie silent for a considerable space, while the following dialogue passed between the sentinels.

'Od, Sandie Scott, think ye it can be true that the English are eating ane another?'

'There's nae doubt o't. I hear that they're snapping up five o' the fattest o' their number every day. They will eat themsels out bit by bit that gate.'

'Aih wow, man! I wad rather die o' hunger than pick the banes of ane acquaintance. Bursten devils, that they are!'

'Aha, Sandie, billie, ye dinna ken till ye be tried. A man will do ought or he die o' hunger. An do you ken, Sandie Scott, I think our captain has done wrang in bringing sae mony fat bullocks a' sae near the castle at ae time. Thae hungered louns will hae a haud o' some o' them, and maybe cut a wheen o' our throats into the bargain, some o' thir dark nights.'

'Now, ye see neighbour, I ken sae weel that our master never does the sma'est thing without some design, that I think he wants to wile out the English, and then kill them; and that he has brought a' thir braw stots o'er the border, just on the same principle that a fisher throws a bait into the water.'

‘Na, na, Sandie, that canna be the case, for he has gi’en strict orders that no ane o’ them be suffered to come within sight o’ the castle. He just thinks the beasts canna be sae safe ony where else as beside himsel’ and his lads. But hunger has sharp een, and I wadna wonder if this drove should lead to some hard tulzie.’

‘Whisht! Godsake, haud your tongue! What’s that I hear?’

‘The English, I’ll warrant you. If hunger hae clear een, fear has unco lang lugs. What was it that Sandie heard?’

‘I heard a kind o’ rubbing and thristing, as a fox or a foumart had been drawing himsel through a hole aneath the ground. Hilloa! What guard?’

‘Howpasley and Gemelscleugh.’

‘Watch weel. There’s something stirring.’

‘Not a mouse.’

‘So say the sleeping foresters; but I can tell you, men o’ Gemelscleuch and Howpasley, an there be nought stirring aboon the ground, the moudies are very busy aneath it the night. Clap close, and keep an ee on the withergloom. I had a heavy dream at nightfa’, and I’m resolved no to close an ee. Come, neighbour, tell a tale, or say a rhame to keep us wauking.’

‘Have ye heard the new ballant made by the rhiming dominie o’ Selchrit, the queerest thing ever was heard? It begins this gate:

The Devil he sat in Dornock tower,
And out at a slip-hole keekit he,
And he saw three craws come yont the lift,
And they winged their flight to the Eildon tree.
O whow, O whow, quo the muckle deil,
But yon’s a sight that glads my ee,
For I’ll lay the steel-brander o’ hell
There’s a storm a-brewing in the west countrye.’

‘Whisht, for heaven’s sake! I heard the tod again, Hilloa! Gemelscleuch to the glaive! Have lug and hawk e’e, or there’ll be news afore the morn that’s unheard tell o’ yet.’

‘And that there will! Saint David be with us! and the blessed Saint Mary, the mother of God, be with us! Hist havering, say Benedicite.’

At that instant a sharp breeze arose which drowned the noise, and Clavering and his men passed fairly by on their perilous expedition. Beyond the next hollow they found the cattle all lying puffing and dozing on a round hill. An immense drove of them there seemed to be, for the hill appeared to be literally covered, but the night was as dark as pitch, and they could see nothing distinctly. Clavering gave his commands in a whisper to his chief men, to surround the whole drove, and drive them furiously, that by these means they might throw the enemy's lines into confusion. 'We have the advantage of the ground,' said he; 'the bridge is clear, and the gates open. Let us play the men for once, and our difficulties are all over. Providence has favoured us beyond what could have been calculated on. Our force is superior to that of our enemies on this side the river. On whatever side our column is attacked, let us keep a running fight, so as to push on and preserve the prey, and the day is our own: And now, Saint Anthony for the right!'

The men then formed themselves into a crescent behind the cattle six-line deep, and with club, goad, and spear pushed them on. There were a few dour lazy driving runts behind that bore all the thumps, but the bulk were high-spirited, and galloped off on the path toward Roxburgh with the utmost fury, insomuch that the delighted drivers never got a sight of them. They broke through the Scottish lines without either stop or stay. The alarm was instantly given, but a night muster is always attended with some delay. So the English thought – so they said; and to their great joy they found their suggestions realized; for not till the last cow was past the strong line of posts on the height were they attacked by the Scots. But then, indeed the Gemelscleuch and Howpasley men set upon them with unparallelled fury, and being every five minutes joined by more of their companions, they pressed hard upon the English, who, being obliged to keep up a retreating battle, fell thick on the brae beyond the bridge. The brave and judicious Longspeare himself led the attack, and behaved like a lion; for though wounded in three different places of the body, he fought in the front of the main battle all that night.

The Scots, to the utter amazement of their enemies, never once offered to stop the cattle, but merely attacking the English crescent behind, drove them and cattle and all towards the bridge. This Clavering and his chief men attributed wholly to the surprise by which the Scots were taken; and when

the former saw the dark column of cattle take the bridge, he thanked the God of heaven, the blessed Virgin, and all the saints whose names were known to him, for such a wonderful success and merciful deliverance. The English host then raised such a shout of triumph that the echoes called from the castled towers to the forest, and from the forest to the distant rocks. The Scots soon joined in it with equal enthusiasm; and the two main armies then engaged at the eastern gate, also joined their voices to the general chorus. They gray friars of Roxburgh, and the Benedictine monks of Kelso, raised their heads from their flinty pillows, committed themselves to heaven, and deplored the madness and folly of the men of the world. The city dames wept and prayed, and the men ran to head-quarters to learn the cause of the uproar. The sounds were actually heard in the camp of Douglas, at the distance of sixteen miles; and when this was reported to him next morning, he said, ‘There was the Redhough on the ramparts of Roxburgh!’

But man’s thoughts are vanity! He cannot judge of events so as to calculate on what is to happen from one moment to another: incidents of the slightest moment so often having the effect of overturning the greatest and most momentous enterprizes. Never was there one so nearly overturned as this, although it was not once thought of till afterwards – and it was on this wise: There was a strong guard of English placed at the south end of the bridge, to guide the foremost of the drove on to it, or help to cut a way for the cattle through such troops as might interpose. The cattle, as was said, came galloping furiously without intervention, and, as if led by an unseen providence, took the bridge with all their vigour, the battle being then raging behind them, and the shouts beginning to rend the sky. This guard had nothing to do, of course, but to open into two lines, and give them head. But at the end of the bridge there was a deep puddle, and among the men there chanced to be a little boy, who was running about and thrashing the cattle as they went through this puddle, which made them spring up the arch with redoubled velocity, which the urchin thought good sport. But in the midst of this frolic he bolted away at once with such velocity that he had almost overthrown one of the men in the file, and as he ran he cried out, ‘Lord, saw ever ony mortal the like o’ that?’ ‘What was it, rash idiot?’ said the man. ‘Grace and mercy, man, did you not see how yon great black stott stood straight up on his hind legs and waded the pool?’ said the boy. ‘Take that to clear your eyes, impertinent brat,’ said the man, and gave him a blow

with his fist that made him run away howling and crying, always repeating as he went, ‘I’ll tell your captain – now! ’at will I that – now!’

The combat behind the cattle thickened apace. The English were sore borne down on the hill, but when they came to the little plain at the bridge-end they stood firm, and gave as hard blows as they got. They had fairly gained their aim, and their spirits, so long depressed, mounted to an unusual height. The last lingering hoof of the whole countless drove was now on the arch, and they could calculate on holding out the fortress against their hated foes not only till Christmas, but till that time twelvemonth. Their shouts of joy were redoubled. So also were those of the Scots. ‘The people are mad!’ said they, ‘thus to shout for their own loss and their own defeat. It is a small trait of the cursed perversity of the whole nation!’

The English narrowed their front and narrowed their front still as their files found room on the arch of the bridge, which was long and narrow, and very steep at the south end, that rose directly from the plain. But the road up to the castle by the two tremendous iron gates was likewise exceedingly steep, and went by a winding ascent, so that the latter end of the drove, those dull driving ones that bore all the strokes, got very slowly up, and with great difficulty. There was a guard of considerable strength left in this gateway by Clavering, lest any attempt should be made by the enemy to enter in his absence. But these men had strict charges to clear the way for the cattle, and help to drive the foremost ones up the steep. The fore part of the drove however came up the steep with such main fury, that the men were glad to clear a way for them, by flying out of the path, up to the citadel. There was not a man left in the gateway, save two at each of the iron portcullises, and these stood in deep niches of the wall, out of all danger. Each of these men held the end of a chain that was twisted round an immense bolt in the wall – and these bolts, Isaac says, are to be seen sticking to this day. On untwisting this chain the portcullises fell down, and when they were to raise up it was done with levers. Well, as the two outermost men stood in their niches, holding by the ends of their chains, they observed, that two of the oxen that first came in, nay the very first two that came in, turned round their ugly heads, leaned their sides to the wall, and kept in their places, the one on the one side and the other on the other, till the whole drove passed them. The men could not move from their posts to drive them on with the rest, but they wondered at the beasts; and the one

cried to the other, ‘What can ail them two chaps?’ ‘O them are two tired ones,’ said the other: ‘Dom them for two ugly monsters! they look as them hod been dead and roosen again.’

At length, by dint of sore driving and beating, the last hoof of the Warden’s choice drove passed inward through the castle gate of Roxburgh, for the maintenance of his irascible enemies. Could any thing be so unfortunate? or how was he to set up his face, and answer to the Douglas now? But the Redhough was determined that he would set up his face and answer to the Douglas and his country too, as well as to his kinsmen and followers, whom he valued highest of all. Just as the last lazy cow crossed the gate, and when the triumphant shouts of the English were at the loudest, the two great lubberly oxen that stood shaking their ugly heads, and leaning against the wall, ripped up their own bellies; and out of two stuffed hides two most ingenious cases, started up two no less men than Sir Ringan Redhough and his doughty friend Charlie Scott of Yardbire. Off went the heads of the two porters in one moment, and down came the portcullis with a thundering rattle, and a clank that made the foundations of the gate shake. ‘Now, southron lads, haud ye there!’ cried the Redhough: ‘Time about is fair play. Keep ye the outside o’ the door threshold as lang as ye hae gart us keep it.’

They next went up and seized the other two porters, whom they saved alive, to teach them how to bolt, bar, open, and shut the gates; but the men had taken the oaths with the rest, and remained obstinate. No threatening could make them move either finger or tongue except in mockery, which provoked the Redhough so that he despatched them likewise. On reaching the great square the Warden found his men in peaceable possession. Six score brave chosen men had entered among the cattle, each in a stuffed ox or cow hide, and had now like their captain cast their sloughs, and stood armed at all points to execute his commands. They found nothing to do, save a prodigious difficulty in working their way from the western to the eastern gate. There were so many turnings and windings; so many doors and wickets; so many ascents and descents – that an army might have gained possession of the one end and yet have been kept out of the other for years. But the surprise here was so complete, that the Borderers had in fact nothing to do but to keep the possession, thus obtained in so easy and at the same time so gallant a style. The shouts that arose from the western battle

had so much encouraged those at the eastern gate, that they had sallied out, and attacking the besiegers sword in hand, had driven them back within their strong line of defence. This retreat was a part of the plan of the Scots, to draw off the remaining force from the gate, and while they were in the hottest of the skirmish, down came Redhough and his lads from the interior of the castle behind them, cut down the few guards about the entrance and the draw-bridge with ease, and having raised that, and shut the double gates on that quarter likewise, he placed the Armstrongs there as a guard, and returned into the interior, still uncertain what enemies he had to combat within.

This mighty fortress was, from the one drawbridge to the other, a full quarter of a mile in length, walled and moated round, and contained seven distinct square or castles, every one of which was a fortress of itself. But the strongest of all was the division on the western part, which was denominated the citadel, and had gates and bars of its own, and towers that rose far above the rest. Into this strong place the sole remnant of the English soldiers had retreated, which consisted merely of the guard that kept the western porch and made way for the cattle, a few stragglers beside, and some official people that kept always within. Through every other part of the castle the Scots found free passage; and by the time the moon had been risen for an hour, the shouts of ‘A Douglas! a Douglas! a Redhough! a Redhough!’ were heard from every part of the walls, excepting the western tower. There indeed a faint and subdued shout announced at intervals the name of the King of England, for it was now no more a Musgrave! and as for Clavering they wist not whether he was dead or alive, taken or at liberty.

When the first ranks of the Englishmen that came up behind the cattle saw the gates shut against them, they took it for some accident, or some mistake that the porters had fallen into, on listening to the shouts of the adverse parties: but after calling and remonstrating to no purpose, they began to suspect that there was treason at the bottom of it, and the whisper of treason spread among that part of the forces which was now forced against the gate. They could do nothing; for they neither had room to fight nor fly, and they knew not whom to suspect, or what had befallen them. As for those at the farther end of the bridge, they were so hotly engaged with their opponents, that they had little time to consider any thing; but finding themselves fixed to the spot, and no movement making toward the gate,

they conceived that something there was wrong, which retarded the regular entrance of the troops for so long a time. They now fought only three to three abreast on the steep arch of the bridge, down which the English drove the Scots six or seven times, the latter always returning to the charge with that vigour which a certainty of success inspires. Clavering fought them in the rear, and in the hottest of the battle still encouraging his men to deeds of desperate valour, little weening how matters went within. But when the names of the Scottish chiefs were resounded from the walls, every heart among the English was chilled, and every arm unnerved in one instant. They had no conception how the thing could have happened; it appeared so far beyond all human power to have effected it, that it was several hours before it gained general credit among them. They had kept the fortress so long, with so little dread of its being wrested from them, and withal suffered so much in it, that they could not believe the evidence of their senses, that by a course of events entirely of their own planning, they should be all without the walls, and the Scots within. It was like a work of enchantment. Like some of the last inconceivable works of the spirits of divination.

The Scots could make no impression on them upon that long narrow bridge; but they could not long stand cooped up there; and when they saw that all hope was lost of regaining entrance, they threw themselves over a high parapet, and took possession of the steep bank between the bottom of the southern wall and the river Teviot. The river being dammed below, it stood like a frith round the bottom of this bank, which was so steep that they could not stand on it, but were obliged to clamber alongst it on their hands and feet. Escape being impracticable, the Scots suffered them to take possession of that bank undisputed, and to keep it, supposing they must surrender next day; but a great number were slain before the latter end of the train was disentangled of the bridge.

The Scots had now free access to the gate, into which Gemelscleuch and Howpasley were admitted. The Warden embraced them, and thanked them for their wise counsel, as well as their great bravery; and they again set about traversing and surveying the fortress, concerning which Charlie Scott said, ‘It wad tak a man a year and a day to find out a’ the turnings and windings about it.’

The battle at the eastern draw-bridge had continued from midnight without intermission; and after the break of day our chiefs witnessed a

scene from the walls that was without a parallel. That division of the Scots army was composed of Douglas' men, being the same troops that were there before, and they were commanded by Sir James Douglas of Dalkeith. That knight got private intelligence of the Warden's intention to storm the castle, by what means he knew not, but resolved to hold himself in readiness; and, as he was desired, when the sortie was made, he retreated at first, drawing them off from the gate. When the cry arose that the castle was taken, his men became frantic with joy, and resolute on taking ample vengeance on their enemies, they burst upon them without regularity, making great havock, and at the same time throwing away many of their own lives. Sir James with great difficulty restrained them, called a parley, and offered the expelled garrison quarter; but they returned for answer, that they weened he had called the parley to ask quarter of them, and they had determined to refuse it. They concluded by telling him to see to himself, and insult them no more by such messages, for as yet he knew not with whom he was warring. The battle was then renewed by the light of the moon with greater fury than ever; they fought like baited bears, with recklessness of life and the silence of death. Deadly hate was in every thrust, and the last words of every falling warrior were, 'Have at them yet.'

When the day light arose, the English fought within a semicircular wall of mangled carcasses; for, grievous to relate, they were not corpses; yet were they piled in a heap higher than a man's height, which was moving with agonized life from top to bottom, and from the one end to the other; for the men having all fallen by sword wounds, few of them were quite dead. The English were now reduced to a small number, yet, in the strife, their ardour seemed to prevail over that of their opponents. The Border chiefs, inured as they were to war, stood amazed, and even shocked, at the scene presented to their view. Yardbire was the first to deprecate it in these words: 'Gude faith, Sirs, it strikes me, that this is rather carrying war to an extremity.'

'Rescue! rescue!' shouted the Warden: 'Give quarter to these men for my sake. I will pay their ransom myself.'

When the Douglas' vassals heard this, they lowered the points of their swords, and drew back from the slaughter, commanding the English to ground their weapons. The latter consulted together for a few minutes, and void of all dread, save that of being obliged to submit to the Scots, they

broke with one consent over the pile of human bodies, and, carrying destruction before them, opened a way into the middle of the Scottish columns; nor ceased they fighting until every man of them was cut down. The rest of the English army were in a fold. Escape was impossible. Ten men could have prevented it on all sides, yet for a whole day and night did they hold their tenure of that perpendicular bank, although before the evening many were losing their holds, and rolling into the river from exhaustion. Then the sudden immersion arousing them somewhat from their torpor, scores of them might be seen at a time crawling to the side of the water, and endeavouring to clamber once more up the bank; but at last they sunk back into the deep, and their last breath arose to the surface in small chains of fetid air bubbles. No one knew what became of the young and intrepid Clavering – at what time, or in what place he fell; and without a head as these men were, it was not till the second morning, when the breath of revenge had cooled, and after much expostulation on the part of the conquerors, that the wretched remnant yielded themselves prisoners of war, and were all suffered to depart on their parole, with high encomiums on their valour. But these commendations were received with the gall of bitterness; and none of them could tell, when they went home, how or by what means they were expelled.

The Warden and his men now set themselves with all their endeavour to take the citadel; and, feebly as it was defended, it cost them no little trouble. It is probable that it might have held out a few days longer, but when Douglas and his army were seen approaching on their return from the battle, the impatience of the Borderers could be no longer restrained; and Yardbire, with a remnant of his Olivers, Potts, and Laidlaws, scaled the wall in the faces of the enemy, who had scarcely power left to cleave a head without a helmet, and throwing themselves into the square, became masters of the gate in a few minutes; so that before Douglas reached the top of the hill of Barns, his colours were placed on the topmost tower of the citadel.

It may easily be conceived with what joy, wonder, and admiration he gazed on this phenomenon. Joy that his broad lands and possessions were thus insured to him, of which for some time past he scarcely retained a hope; and admiration how that indefatigable chief had accomplished, in a few days, that which he had exerted himself in vain to accomplish for the space of as many months. The idea of being so far outdone in policy was

without doubt somewhat bitter to the palate of a Douglas, for never till this day can they brook a competitor in the field; but, considering how matters stood, it would have been the worst of policy to have let such a feeling appear. Douglas therefore testified the highest satisfaction, extolling the Warden's head to conceive and hand to accomplish, in terms such as he had never been heard to utter. 'Glorious Redhough! unparallelled Redhough!' exclaimed he again and again: 'Thou and thy lads are the men to trust.'

The chief received him at the castle gate, welcoming him in jocular terms of high chivalry to the castle of Roxburgh, which he took care always to denominate 'my castle.' This was soon noted by the Douglas; and as soon as they entered the governor's house in the citadel, Douglas made over to him, by regular deeds and instruments, the seven first baronies he chose to name. This document, together with the royal charters confirming it, is extant, and in the possession of one of the Warden's lineal descendants at this day. On receiving this grant, signed, sealed, and witnessed, Sir Ringan delivered over the keys of the castle to the Earl of Douglas and Mar, and the two exchanged seats at the table. Douglas also conferred the honours of knighthood on Charlie Scott, Simon Longspeare, and John of Howpasley; while Sir Ringan bestowed one of his new baronies on each of these brave gentlemen in support of their new dignities, burdened only with a few additional servitudes. On his right hand hero, the hereditary claimant of the post of honour, he conferred the barony of Raeburn and Craik, that he might thenceforward be the natural head of his hard-headed Olivers and skrae-shankit Laidlaws. To Long-speare he gave Temadale; and to Howpasley, Phingland and Langshaw. When Charlie first rose from his knee, and was saluted as Sir Charles Scott of Raeburn and Yardbire, he appeared quite cast down, and could not answer a word. It was supposed that his grateful heart was overcome with the thought that the reward bestowed on him by his generous chief had been far above his merits.

The news of the capture were transmitted to court with all expedition; on which King Robert returned word, that he would, with his queen, visit the Douglas in the castle of Roxburgh, and there, in the presence of the royal family, and the nobles of the court, confer on him his daughter's hand in marriage, along with such other royal grants and privileges as his high gallantry and chivalrous spirit deserved. He added, that he had just been apprized by his consort, that his daughter, the princess Margaret, had been

for some time living in close concealment in the vicinity of Roxburgh, watching the progress of her lover with a devotion peculiar to her ardent and affectionate nature. If the Douglas was aware of this, which the King had some reasons for supposing, he requested that he would defer seeing her until in the presence of her royal parents. There was a thrust indeed! An *eclaircissement* was approaching too much for man to bear –. But that heart-rending catastrophe must be left to the next chapter. In the meantime, for perspicuity's sake, we must relate how this grand device of the Warden's originated, by which the castle was won, and himself and followers honoured and enriched.

It was wholly owing to the weird read by the great enchanter Master Michael Scott. So that though the reader must have felt (as the editor did in a very peculiar manner,) that Isaac kept his guests too long in that horrible place the castle of Aikwood, it will now appear that not one iota of that long interlude of his could have been omitted; for till the weird was read, and the transformation consummated, the embassy could not depart – and unless these had been effected, the castle could not have been taken. The editor, for brevity's sake left out both the youth's and maiden's characteristic tales, which shall appear by and by, but more he durst not cancel.

When the passage out of the book of fate was repeated to Sir Ringan, he never for a moment doubted either its truth or fulfilment, provided he and his friends could discover its true meaning. But the words were wrapt in mystery; and, when conjoined with the enchantment practised on his men, were for a long time so completely unintelligible, that all save Sir Ringan himself, and his echo Dickie of Dryhope, gave up the hope of reconciling the given destiny with reason or common sense. As for the friar, he entered his protest against paying any regard to it from the beginning, on the principle that all the Master's powers and foreknowledge were deputed to him by subordinate and malevolent spirits, and that good could not arise out of evil. The Warden's philosophy, on the other hand, taught him to estimate facts and knowledge as he found them developed among mankind, without enquiring too nicely into the spirit of their origin; for the more deeply that was wrapt in mystery, the more powerful was its sway over his imagination. Charlie Scott felt much disposed to coincide with his master in these principles, but in all deep matters he was diffident in offering his advice or sentiments. He, however, hit upon the right cue in this instance, and that by

the most natural combination of ideas that ever presented themselves to mortal man. The right understanding of the prophecy was about to be given up in despair. The intervals of silence during the discussion were becoming longer and longer each time. It was in order to break one of these, rather than to impose his advice on his chief, that Charlie ventured to deliver himself as follows: ‘Gude faith, my masters, I see nothing for it, but that we get Master Michael Scott to turn us into fat owsen again, or bulls, or stotts, or what ye like. Then the English will drive us a’ gladly into the castle for marts to their beef barrels. But when we are fairly in, we wad need the gospel friar to change us to men again, or, gude faith, we wad be in a bad predicament. But I hae some faith to put in auld Michael’s power, (as I hae good right,) and gin that could be done as he seemed to hint, by the blood of Bruce! but we wad dowss their doublets for them.’

‘Might we not rather disguise ourselves as cattle, cousin?’ said Howpasley.

‘I have seen our jugglers and mountebank players,’ said Long-speare, ‘disguise themselves as a lion, a tiger, a bear, a wolf, and even as a great serpent, and dragon, so that I myself took them for these animals.’

‘Why then may not we disguise ourselves as oxen, so that we may pass for them in a dark night?’ said the Warden.

‘Ay, in a dark night,’ said Dickie; ‘what is to hinder us? If we but walk on all four we will pass with hungry men for oxen in a dark night.’

Thus was the hint given, which was improved on as above related, till it effected the desire and important event, the taking of Roxburgh castle, and that in the most masterly and prudent style ever conceived by man. They had a small drove of cattle collected, as well as hides; but the disguised ones took care to keep in the front or the middle of these, in short on the side farthest from an Englishman. The one who walked through the dub in an upright posture, had not perceived the shabby boy so near him.

Abundance of all the good things that the kingdom could produce were now poured into the castle with all expedition; and every preparation made for the reception of the King and Queen of Scotland. The carnage had been so great at the two gates that night the fortress was taken, that the citizens of Roxburgh, as well as the three establishments of monks and friars in the vicinity, besought of Douglas that the slain might not be buried nigh to the city, for fear of infection; and if this was granted, they proffered to be at the

sole charge of removing and burying them with all holy observances. This was readily granted, and they were removed to a little plain behind the present village, where thousands of their bones have lately been dug up. The burying continued for three days.

CHAPTER 29

O I hae seen the gude auld day,
The day o' pride and chieftain glory,
When royal Stuarts bore the sway,
And ne'er heard tell o' Whig nor Tory.
Though lyart be my locks and gray,
And eild has crook'd me down – what matter?
I'll dance and sing ae ither day,
That day our King comes o'er the water.

Jacobite Song

From the time of the taking of the castle until the arrival of King Robert, was an interval of high festivity. The Border chiefs and yeomen went home to their respective places of abode with abundant spoil, having been loaded with rich presents from the Douglas, as well as their share of Sir Ringan's numberless booties, which he always divided among them with great liberality; and it was computed that, in the course of that predatory warfare, he drove thirty thousand domestic animals out of the English territory. The Scottish Border districts were never so well stocked before. For a century previous to that, they had lain waste, having been entirely depopulated, and left no better than a hunting forest. That reign enriched them, and its happy effects have never since been obliterated.

Among other things that happened in this joyful interval, old Peter Chisholm received a message one day, informing him that the stranger to whom he had betrothed his daughter would appear next day to claim the fulfilment of his promise.

'They'll eat up every thing that's within the house,' said Peter: 'If he will have her, it wad suit better for us to meet them at Hawick. The half o' the expences there wad lye to him at ony rate; and if he made weel through wi' his hides, mayhap he wad pay the halewort. He's a brave chield enough, it wad appear; but I wish he had fawn aff the tap o' his humphed ill-smelled

hides, and broken the bane o' his neck; for it will be a wae sight to me to see the flower of a' the Chisholms gang away wi' an English cadger. Oh, wae be to the day!'

'What is a man but his word, father?' said Dan. 'I think the gallant way in which the stranger behaved entitles him well, not only to the flower o' the Chisholms, but to the best in the house beside.'

'Ay, ay, that's aye the gate! fling away! fling away! till ye'll soon fling away every plack your auld father has gathered for ye. But, hark ye, callant Dan: Gin ye will stand by me, I'll gainsay the fellow yet, and refuse to gie him my Bess.'

'Hear what Bess says hersel,' said Dan, 'and then I'll gie my answer.'

Bess was sent for, who declared not only her willingness, but her resolution to abide by her father's agreement; but, added, that if a better came before him, and made her an offer, she would not wait a minute on her leather-merchant.

'Heard ever ony body the like o' that?' said Peter: 'What trow ye is the chance for that? How lang hae ye hung on the tree wi' a red cheek an' a ripe lip, and never man to streek out the hand to pu' ye? There was aince a neighbour I had some hopes o'; an' he has a good heart too, for a' his jibes, an ane durst but tell him!'

Peter said these last words to himself, as he was turning about to leave the apartment – for he was at that time forming in his mind one of those superlative schemes which strike dotage as plans of the mightiest and most acute device, but which youth and energy laugh at. This was no other than to be early astir next morning, and, before any of his family was aware, gallop over to Craik, a matter of seven miles, and beg of Will Laidlaw to come and run off with his daughter before she fell into the hands of an English skinman. This grand scheme he actually put in practice, but met Laidlaw and his jovial party by the way, who wondered not a little when they saw old Pate coming gallopping up the Fanesh ridge, having his great pike staff heaved over his shoulder, with which he was every now and then saluting the far loin of his mare, and that with an energy that made all his accoutrements wallop. He never perceived the bridal party till close on them, and till he was asked by half a score voices at once, 'What's the great haste, Castleweary! Where are ye gawn at sic a rate sae early in the morning? Are your ha's burnt? Are your cattle driven? Have the Ha's and

the Reids been o'er the fells aince mair?' And many other such questions were put, before Peter got a word spoken or a thought thought. He only bit his lip, and looked very angry, at being caught in such a plight. But seeing Will Laidlaw at the head of his kinsmen, he took him aside, and imparted his grand secret. Will's sides were like to burst with laughter. He, however, contained himself, while Peter went on 'But ye had better turn a' that clan again, wha hae nought ado at a' wi' us but put things to waste. The less din about the thing the better.'

'But how are we to answer the skin-merchant when he comes then, Castleweary? That tremendous buyer of hides will hew us all to pieces.'

'Ay, ye maun just take a' the blame on yoursels, you and Bess. He'll no mak muckle at the Laidlaw's hands, or he'll do what never ony did afore him.'

'I certainly have the greatest respect for your daughter; but times are hard and dangerous, and I have nae great opinion o' marriage.'

'Come, now, I like to hear that; for ye ken fock maun ay read a Laidlaw backward; and if the times are hard, I shall be satisfied with a very small dowry. Perhaps the matter o' ten tup hogs aff the Criblaw, sax owsen aff Hosecot, and—

'Hold there, my old friend; and I will run all risks, and take away your daughter Elizabeth; let the skin-man look to himself.'

'Weel, God bless ye wi' her. Ye'll get the flower of a' the Chisholms, and the best bairn o' the bike.'

Bess was a winsome and a blithe bride that day, and though the wounds she received in the engagement with the marauders were not quite whole, she danced the best at the wedding, and was the first that lighted on Craik-green. Dan entertained his fellow-soldiers nobly; but old Peter was terribly in the fidgets, not only at the huge waste of meat and drink that he now saw going on, but for the fear of the arrival of the outrageous and ill-used hide-merchant, and never till his dying day could he be brought to identify his son-in-law with the stranger to whom he first promised his daughter. But for many a day, when the dogs barked, he hasted out in great agitation, lest the dealer in skins and his associates should come upon him unawares. Sandie Pott having found a very kind, attentive, and, withal, a very indulgent nurse, in the younger daughter, May Chisholm, there chanced two weddings at Castleweary on the same day.

Among other matters of that eventful period, Isaac the curate mentions also a petition of the friar to Sir Ringan, that he would use his interest to get the youthful bard, who had come an adventurer into his army, replaced in his rights of the lordship of Ravensworth; and likewise that he would grant him the captive maid, Delany, for his bride. These important connections had never before come to the Warden's ears; and when he heard the extraordinary adventures, and early misfortunes of the twain, he manifested the greatest concern for their welfare. But the maid, by the laws of those days, was the right and property of Sir Charles Scott, who seemed unwilling to part with her, and she not less so to be divided from him, now that his late honours became him so well. This was a distressing consideration to the poet, and he would in nowise leave her, to lay claim to his paternal estate, till he saw how matters would turn in his favour. But the friar still encouraged him, assuring him, 'that he should be restored to the house and to the inheritance of his fathers; and that the fairest among the daughters of women, even the sole remaining stem of the house of Galli the scribe, should be unto him as a spouse and a comforter.'

But among all the festivities at Roxburgh, and all the mighty preparations for the reception of royalty, and the spending of the Christmas holidays in such company, the countenance of Douglas was manifestly overcast. He affected mirth and gaiety, but a hideous and terrific gloom frequently settled on his dark manly countenance. The princess's shameful and untimely death hung heavy on his mind, and the secret of it still heavier. His conscience upbraided him, not with any blame in the matter, for he was alike ignorant of the rank and sex of his fantastical page: But her devotion to his cause and person; the manner in which she had exerted herself by putting her rival into his hands; the love-tokens slily given to him by her own dear self; her admonitory letters; and all her whimsical and teazing inuendos, came over his mind, and combined in rendering her memory ten times dearer to him than ever he conceived that of human being could have been. And then, how was all this requited? By bad humour, disrespect, and a total disregard of her danger and sufferings. The most enthusiastic, affectionate, and accomplished lady of the age in which she lived, was suffered to be put down as a common criminal, without one effort being made to save her; and that delicate and beautiful form thrust down into a common charnel-house among the vulgar dead. Knowing all these things as he did, how could he

again behold her royal parents? and knowing all these things as he did, why had he not related the lamentable facts as they had happened, and conducted himself accordingly? There was fixed the acme of his dilemma. The detail of that lady's love and fate rose before his mind's eye, like a dark unseemly arch, of which this was the keystone; and there was a power stood above it that held his soul in controul, and beyond that he could not pass. Was it indeed true, that the spirit of his royal and beloved mistress walked the earth, and from day to day laid her stern behests upon him? And could it be that such a spirit attended upon him in his most secret retirements; and, though unseen, watched over all his motions, words, and actions? Or how else could the very thoughts and purposes of his heart, together with his most secret transactions, be repeated to him by this holy monk? Nay, though he had never actually seen this apparition, he had heard his mistress's voice one night speaking to him as from behind the hangings, and charging him, as he respected his own and her soul's welfare, to keep her fate concealed from all flesh.

Whenever the Douglas got leisure to think at all, amid the hurry of his military duties, these cogitations preyed on his mind; and one night when they had thrown him into a deep reverie, the monk Benjamin was announced.

'I cannot see him to-night: Tell him to come and speak with me to-morrow,' said Douglas.

'He craves only a few moments audience, Lord of Douglas; and he says, that, unless he is admitted, a visitor of another nature will wait on you forthwith.'

'What is the meaning of this?' said Douglas: 'Must my privacy be broken in upon, and my mind placed on the rack, at the pleasure of every fanatical devotee? Tell him that I will not be disturbed to-night. But – I think not what I am saying. Admit him. Well, reverend and holy father – madman rather! What is your important business with me?'

'That saintly vision has again been with me.'

'Out upon thee, maniac and liar! There has been no such thing with thee; and thou hast trumped up a story in order to keep the power of the Douglas under thy ghostly and interested controul.'

'If I am a visionary, Lord, it is for thyself to judge. I speak nothing as of myself, but the words of one that has sent me. If thou darest say they are the

visions of a maniac, in future I keep them to myself, and do you abide by the consequences.'

'Thinkest thou that I will not, or that I dare not abide by any consequences? Hence! Begone!'

'Rash precipitate man! thou shalt repent this! What interest can I possibly have in whispering these truths in thine ear? Did I ever ask or hint at a favour from thee? Or was aught ever, save thy own welfare, the purport of my messages? Adieu, my lord! There must another commissioner wait on you presently, and one who will elude the most vigilant of your sentinels.'

'Stay, Benjamin: Thou art, indeed, blameless. If thou hast ought to warn me of, say it and have done, for I am not in a mood to be trifled with.'

'I have been bid to caution you to look to yourself, for that there is treason within the walls of this castle. Will you answer me one or two queries truly and seriously, that I may know whether the being that commissioned me be a true spirit or a false one?'

'I will.'

'Have you got a private offer to a prodigious amount for the ransom of Lady Jane Howard?'

'Monk, thou hast had this from hell –. I have.'

'Which thou hast rejected, with the secret intent of asking her in marriage yourself, should circumstances concur to favour the device?'

'It is false! – false as the source whence thou hadst it.'

'Ah! Then have I done! my informant is a false one.'

'Or, if I had, it was some passing thought, which no man can gainsay, and for which none are accountable.'

'Neither is it true that you visited her in disguise last night?'

The Douglas gazed upon the monk in silence, with an eye in which there was an unnatural gleam of madness. He drew his breath three times, as if he would have spoken, but made no answer. The monk continued: 'If these are truths, then list to the following behest – if they are false thou needest not regard it: There is a conspiracy among thy people for the rescue of Lady Jane. They have been bribed by unheard-of rewards. Thy guards are of course to be cut down, otherwise the rescue cannot be effected; and if thy own head is added to the convoy, the guerdons are all to be doubled.'

The Douglas started to his feet, and held up both his hands: 'By the blessed Virgin it is true!' exclaimed he – 'True every word of it! There have

been petitions made to me for the use of certain keys already. Ay, and I have granted some of them too. I see through a part of the conspiracy. But I'll sift the traitors! I'll make carrion of them.'

'If I am rightly informed, it may yet be prevented without being made manifest, which would be greatly preferable. Beware of Kinlossie. And list, for my time is expired: If you value your own name, see not the face of Lady Jane again, till you present her to your sovereign.'

The monk retired with precipitation, and left the Douglas overwhelmed with tumultuary and adverse passions. 'Still the Lady Jane Howard!' said he to himself: 'Nothing but the Lady Jane Howard! Is it possible this can be an agent of hers? But the inference contradicts the whole scope and tendency of his missions. I must investigate this matter without delay.' He raised his small bugle to his mouth, for in those days that answered all the purposes of a house bell, and many more. Every officer in castle or camp knew, by the blast blown, when his personal attendance was required. Douglas lifted his to his mouth – but before he sounded it, the knight in waiting announced 'a lady.' No bolder heart than that of Douglas beat in a Scottish bosom. Nevertheless it quaked; for he thought of the threatening of the monk, that another commissioner should visit him, whom his guards should not be able to repel. His agitation was now wrought up to the highest pitch, for he attempted to pronounce some words, of which the knight knew not the import – probably it was a command to expel her, or to call in some guards; but before the order could be understood or complied with, the lady herself entered. 'There she is, my lord!' said the knight in a whisper; 'and none of us know whence or how she came hither.'

The lady came slowly by, and the knight retired with all speed. She bore indeed the figure and form of the late princess, but the roses of youth and beauty were gone, and in their room a clayey paleness pervaded the features, which were even whiter than the cambric by which the face was surrounded. The figure held up its right hand as it advanced, and fixed its eyes on the earl; but no man to this day ever knew any thing farther of that conference. The knight in waiting, shortly after he had retired, heard a noise within as of a man choking and endeavouring to cry out; and, bringing two more attendants with him, they all three rushed into the apartment, and found the Douglas fallen back on the embroidered couch in a state of mental abstraction, or rather of total insensibility, and the lady was gone.

They immediately applied themselves to the restoration of their lord, which they effected in a short time. Animation soon returned, but reason wavered in a state of instability for several hours. During that period he had for a number of times inquired who admitted that stranger, or who saw her depart? The men assuring him each time, that no one saw her till she was observed standing in the anti-chamber; and that none was either admitted into the citadel or seen depart, save the starveling monk who attended him frequently as his confessor. 'There has been another lady,' they added, begging admission to your presence for a whole day and night, which has always been refused her, in consequence of your peremptory order. She has at the last resorted to the means always at a woman's command, tears and threatenings; and she vows, that if she is not admitted to an audience, you shall dearly repent it.'

'What, another still?' said the Douglas: 'No, I'll see no more women today, nor tomorrow, nor next day. Do you know, Eveldon, what I think of women?'

'No, Lord Douglas, but well what I think of them myself, which is, that they are nature's masterpieces.'

'The pests of society, Eveldon. I deem them subordinate creatures, created solely for man's disquietude. The warrior is naturally surrounded by dangers; but, till he engages with women, he rises superior to them all; it is then that his troubles and perils begin. No, I'll see no more women tonight.'

'Might I advise, my lord, it would be, that you should give her admission. It appears so strange to see a lovely and most courtly dame standing weeping at your gate. The very commonest of the people sympathise with her, and blame your neglect. Beshrew me, if any knight in the realm would refuse such a suit; no, not the King himself.'

'Do you think, Sir John of Eveldon, that I can submit to be ruled by women and their agents? I, who never held them as ought save as beings formed for man's pleasures or his interests. My hands are free of their blood, Sir John – my heart, if ever it was in bonds, is now emancipated; and yet, by their means, has my life of late been held in thraldom.'

'Say that I may admit this dame, my lord.'

'Well, be it so, and let us be quit of her. In the mean time, let the guards be tripled, and stand to your arms. I have had strange intelligence to-night; if true, there will be a dangerous commotion in less than an hour hence.'

‘The forces of the two kingdoms cannot disturb you here to-night, Lord Douglas.’

‘See to it – there is treason within our walls. Who are on guard?’

‘The Gordons, and Lindsay of Kinlossie’s men.’

‘The Gordons I can trust – let the others be changed without delay, Sir John, and see them consorted to the camp –. Call up the Douglasses of the Dales, and let them look to themselves. Admit that petitioner in whom you are so much interested, and call me on the slightest appearance of insubordination.’

Sir John did as he was commanded, and forthwith introduced Mary Kirkmichael of Balmedie. The impatience and mortification that the Douglas manifested under this trial is not to be described, for he had promised to give her information of her royal mistress as soon as he had it in his power, and yet he neither had the heart nor the resolution, after the charges he had received of secrecy, to tell her of her mistress’ woeful fate. At Mary’s first entrance into his presence, she rushed forward and kneeled at his feet, crying, in the most passionate manner, ‘O, my dear lord, tell me what has become of my mistress. This suspense is dreadful. The castle is now in your hands, and all the prisoners, if such there were; but there are shocking insinuations whispered abroad. Her father and mother are on their way to visit you here; and what shall I say to them for the loss of my dear mistress? O, Lord Douglas, if you know of her, as know of her you must, tell me where I can see her. Dead or alive, let me but see her. Or tell me when I shall see her.’

‘Lady, that is more than I can tell you; but if it will give you any heart’s ease, as certainly as I speak to you I saw her in this apartment to-night.’

‘Blessed are the news to me, my lord! But why, then, won’t you admit me to her? Send me instantly to her presence, Lord Douglas, for I know she cannot be in any state of concealment in which my company cannot be welcome. I implore you to send me forthwith to her presence.’

‘Send you to her presence? That would be a cruel act! Dame, you and your sex have moved my spirit from its erect and heavenward position. It is like a tree bowed by the wind, and the branch of memory is stripped of its fruit. Did I say I saw the Princess Margaret in this apartment? – You must not credit it. There’s an incoherence in the principle, or nature has hasty productions not accounted for. You must not believe it, lady; for till the

porter opens the great gate to you, your royal mistress you shall not see again.'

'Are not all the gates opened or shut at your controul, my lord? You speak to me in paradoxes. I comprehend it all well enough, however. I will go in or out at any gate; only, in one word, conduct me to my mistress.'

'Hell has no plague like this! No, there are no other fiends that can torment a man in this manner.' He blew his bugle –. 'Eveldon, conduct this dame to her mistress. She is in the great state prison, you know, the receptacle of royalty and thraldom, and let me not hear another word. I'll throw him over the battlements that next mentions the name of a woman to me.'

The lady curtsied, and thanked the Douglas; and Sir John, mistaking his lord's frantic sarcasm for a serious command, hurried Mary Kirkmichael up stairs to the topmost apartment of the great tower, and ushered her in, without farther ceremony, to Lady Jane Howard and her attendant. Lady Jane rose and came running toward them; but, seeing who approached, she started, and retreated to her place. As the two ascended the narrow staircase, there was a great commotion in the square below, therefore, Sir John turned the key and hastened down again. The noise increased, and he heard there was a stern engagement, in which the name of Lady Jane was given as a rallying word on the one side. At the bottom of the stair the conspirators met him, having broken through the ranks in that direction; for the Gordons flew to guard the apartments of the Douglas, not knowing what the object of the insurrection was. Sir John had just time to shut a doublebarred door in front of them; and, retreating up one storey, he shouted from the balcony to apprize the Douglas, else the Lady Jane Howard was gone. One from the ranks ran to apprize the captain, but losing himself among the intricacies of the entrance, he shouted out, 'Lord Douglas! Lord Douglas!' with the utmost vociferation. The Douglas was sitting in a deep reverie; his drawn sword was lying on the table beside him. He heaved it above his shoulder, and running to the door of the apartment, opened it, and asked the fellow, who was still bawling in the dark, what it was? ''Tis the Lady Jane Howard!' answered he, in the same shouting voice. 'Damnation on the tongue that says it!' exclaimed the Douglas in ire: 'Am I never more to hear aught repeated but the names of women? Do you know the penalty of that word, recreant? I have sworn to throw you from the battlements, but that

shall not prevent me from cleaving you to the earth in the first place. Women! women! Nothing but one woman after another! I'll cut down every man that dares name one to me in that manner!' As he said these words, he rushed toward the soldier with his heavy sword heaved, but the man, flying with all expedition, escaped into the court. The Douglas followed him, and was soon in the midst of a confused engagement; and hearing the conspirators shouting the same name, 'Lady Jane Howard!' he took it as in derision and flew on their ranks with such fury, that every man at whom he struck fell to the ground. The Gordons followed him up, crying 'A Douglas!' but the conspirators were the stronger party, and would ultimately have prevailed, had not the Douglasses of the Dales arrived to change guard as formerly ordered; and then, Kinlossie having fallen in an attempt to slay the Douglas, his party surrendered. There was a strong troop of English horsemen waiting on the other side of the Teviot with a raft, to whom she was to have been let down from the wall. But the information lodged by the monk not only frustrated the whole of the desperate expedition of the Howards, but saved the life of Douglas. For the conspirators receiving the unexpected orders to depart to the camp, were driven to make the attempt prematurely, before their measures formerly concocted were ripe for execution.

Of all the circumstances that had hitherto occured, the reflection upon this bewildered the mind of Douglas the most. The manner in which these secret combinations had been revealed to him filled his heart both with gratitude and amazement; and as all endeavours at reconciling them with nature or reason only increased the mystery, he resolved to shake the load from his spirits and think no more of them. That he might effect this with greater promptitude, he kept his noble kinsmen constantly about him by night as well as by day. The Redhough also returned from his visit to Mountcomyn, as did all the knights and gentlemen commoners of his party from their respective homes, mounted in their most splendid accoutrements, to greet their Sovereign, render him an account of their services, and proffer him due homage. But, among all these Border chiefs, there was none whose appearance attracted so much admiration as that of Sir Charles Scott of Raeburn and Yardbire. Before that time, the only attention he had ever paid to his habiliments, was that of procuring the best suits of armour that could possibly be obtained. As the leader of the Warden's vanguard column, and

his right-hand files in line, he knew it behoved him to be well armed, and in that article he was never deficient. But now that he had to appear before his Sovereign in full pride of array, as the knight of Raeburn and the Warden's right-hand man, he deemed it requisite to have an equipment becoming his rank; so he rummaged the old oaken wardrobe and armour-chest at Yardbire, and from the knightly spoils of ages got himself fitted out, by a skilful hand, in a style that amazed all his former compeers. Both himself and his horse Corbie were literally covered with burnished gold; while the playful restiveness of the one, and the manly and almost colossal figure of the other, rendered the appearance of our warrior a sight truly worthy of admiration. The activity and elasticity of all his motions, combined with his invincible muscular strength, and urbanity of countenance and manners, rendered Charlie at all times an interesting object; but till once he appeared in his plumes and light armour studded with gold, no one could have believed that he was so comely and graceful a personage. At the same time the very consciousness of his appearance, and the rank that he was obliged to support, raised his personal carriage and address many degrees, as by a charm; so that wherever the Warden and his train presented themselves, strangers always appeared disposed to move their bonnets to Sir Charles, whom they took for a king, or an earl at the very least.

The arrival of these heroes added a great deal to the hilarity, tilting, and other military amusements at Roxburgh; until at last the 24th of December arrived, and with it the word that the King and Queen were on their way to Roxburgh, and approaching by the wild path of Soutra-edge. There was no bustle at the castle or city of Roxburgh, save by the city dames and maidens, for whom the approaching festival appeared a glorious epocha; for since the days of Edward Longshanks, who kept his court there for some weeks, there had not been a crowned head within the precincts of that illustrious city. Consequently, with these fair denizens, and with the merchants who attended that mart once a year from many of the towns on the Continent, it was a time of hurry and preparation; but with the warriors it was far otherwise. They were ready before; every one being alike anxious to fulfil the part entrusted to him – so that they had nothing ado but to mount and ride in the order assigned to them.

First of all rode Sir Ringan Redhough, supported by all the gentlemen of the middle and west marches – the Scotts, the Elliots, the Armstrongs, and

the Olivers, were the most powerful of these: And next in order came the Laidlaws, the Brydens, the Glendenyngs, and the Potts. After them rode the copper-nosed Kers, the towzy Turn-bulls, and the red-wudd Ridderfords; for in those days every sept had some additional appellative or by-name. These were also mixed with a number of smaller septs, such as the Robsons, the Dicksons, the hurkle-backed Hendersons, and the rough-riding Riddels; and they were all headed by the doughty Sir Andrew Ker of Aultonburn. Next in order rode Old Willie Wiliecoat, named also *Willie wi' the white doublet*, the ancestor of the Earls of Home – a brave and dauntless character, who for the space of forty years had been a sight of terror to the English, with his white jacket. With him rode the gentlemen of his own name, the hard-rackle Homes, the dorty Dunbars, the straitlaced Somervilles, and the Baillies. Then came the proud Pringles, a powerful sept, mixed with a countless number of dependent families, headed by Pringle of Galashiels; and after them the Gordons, led by Sir John of that ilk.

All these held lands of the Douglas, on conditions of certain services; they were nevertheless all independent chiefs, these services performed; but at this time they attended personally, with their kinsmen, to pay their dutiful respects to their Sovereign. Last of all came the Douglasses, in five separate bodies, every one headed by a lord or knight of the name; and these made up one-third of the whole cavalcade, the Earl himself being with the last party of all, and most gallantly attended.

The two parties met at Earlston, but the royal party was nothing in point of bearing and splendour to that of the Doughlasses. The King and Queen travelled each in a litter borne by two gallant steeds. These carriages were very splendid in their decorations, and constructed in the same way as a sedan chair, and it was truly wonderful with what velocity they were borne along. They were contrived for the King's use, who had a halt, and could not travel on horseback; and they suited the state of the roads in Scotland at that period exceedingly. Two heralds rode before his Majesty, who introduced the various chiefs to him as he passed, and those others of whose names he enquired, among whom Sir Charles Scott was the first. The Queen and her Maries also saluted him along with the Warden. The whole procession then drew up in files until their Majesties passed, after which they fell all into their places, the order of precedency being then reversed,

and the Doughlasses next to the Sovereign. There was no time for delay, considering the season, the darkness of the night, and the shortness of the day; so they posted on with all manner of expedition, and yet it was dark before they reached the abbey of Kelso. But all the way, by the cloisters, the bridge, and up the High-street of the city of Roxburgh, there were tiers of torches raised above one another that made it lighter than the noonday. Never was there such a scene of splendour witnessed in that ancient and noble city; to which the darkness of the canopy above, and the glare of torchlight below, added inconceivable grandeur. It seemed as if all the light and beauty of the universe had been confined within that narrow space, for without all was blackness impervious to the eye, but within there was nothing but brilliancy, activity, and joy. Seven score musical instruments, and as many trilling but discordant voices, yelled forth, from the one end of the street to the other, that old song beginning,

‘The King came to our town;
Ca’ Cuddie, ca’ Cuddie!
The King came to our town,
Low on the Border.’

The trumpets sounded before, and the bugles behind; and the Border youths and maidens were filled with enthusiastic delight at the novelty of the spectacle. They followed with shouts to the castle gate, and then returned to talk of what they had seen, and what they should see on the morrow.

The royal party was conducted to the citadel, where every thing was in readiness for a grand entertainment; and there the Douglas delivered into the King’s hands the keys of the castle of Roxburgh. His Majesty received them most graciously, and thanked him for all the cost, pains, and trouble that he had taken for the good of the realm; and added, that he came prepared in heart and mind to fulfil his engagements to him in return. There was now a manifest embarrassment on the part of the Douglas; his countenance changed; and he looked as he would have asked for the Princess, or, at least, as if some one were wanting that ought to have been there; but after an agitated pause, he could only stammer out, that ‘he was

much beholden to his Majesty, who might at all times command his utmost services without bounty or reward.'

'I trust that is not as much as to say that you now decline the stipulated reward for this high service,' said the King.

'Sire, I see none either for your Majesty to give, or your servant to receive,' said the Douglas; and at the same time he cast a hasty and perturbed glance at the courtiers and warriors ranged around the hall. The king nodded by way of assent to his hint; and at the same time said to him, aside, 'I understand you, Lord Douglas. You will explain this gallantry of yours, in keeping your sovereign's daughter in concealment from her natural guardians, in private to-morrow. But, pray, can we not see our darling to-night?'

'Alas, my leige lord and sovereign,' said Douglas, passionately, 'sure you jest with your servant, thus to tax him with that of which he is innocent.'

The King smiled, and waving his hand jocularly, by way of intimating that he thought his affected secrecy prudence at that time, left him, and forthwith went halting up among the Borderers, to converse with them about the affairs of the English marches. The stately and commanding figure of Charlie Scott, who was like Saul among the people, again attracted the King's eyes, and he went familiarly up to him, and said at once, 'Well, gallant knight, how have accounts balanced between you and your southern neighbours since last Lammas-tide?'

'Gude faith, my liege lord and king, I can hardly tell you,' said Sir Charles, without hesitation: 'There hae been some hard yerks gaun; but the last quarter stands rather aboon an average wi' us. It is a kittle bauk that hings o'er the Border, my liege; it is often nae sooner down to the yird than it is up to the starns again.'

'Well said, knight! I like your fair wit and free humour,' said the King. 'So, upon the whole, you judge that the balance preponderates on our side just now?'

'I should think sae, Sire, when sic a clod as this castle of Roxburgh is thrown into the bucket. It is nae witherweight this for the end of a weigh-bauk. A' the kye o' the Seven Dales winna carry the swee to the south side again.'

The Queen, hearing her lord conversing so freely and jocularly with this goodly personage, came also up with two of her ladies of honour, in order

to put in a word; ‘for (says Isaac, with great simplicity) women always like to be striking kemps with a handsome and proper man; and the bigger of bone, and the stronger of muscle, the more is he the object of their admiration.’

When Sir Charles had finished the last remark, therefore, the Queen smiled complacently in his face, and said, ‘You must certainly acknowledge, gallant knight, that you have been much indebted to heaven for your singular success in this instance?’

Sir Charles nodded his head. ‘Its a’ that ye ken about it, my lady queen. But saft be the sough that says it. I trow we were mair indebted to some other place in the first instance.’

The Queen held up her hands: ‘Uh! what does the knight mean? Say, my lord, What? What place?’ Then turning to Sir Ringan, who was terribly in the fidgets about what had dropped from his kinsman, she added, ‘I trust our right traist warden and loving cousin did not practise any of the diabolical arts, so prevalent of late, to accomplish his hard task?’ And then, with a woman’s natural volubility, when once her tongue is set a-going, she added, turning to Charlie, without waiting the Warden’s reply, ‘What place does Sir Charles mean? I hope you would not insinuate that you had any dealings with the spirits of darkness?’

‘Not with hell directly, madam,’ answered Charlie, (for Isaac can never help calling him occasionally by his old title,) ‘but I canna say that we didna get a strong hint frae ane or twa of its principal agents. No offence, my lady queen. I ken by report, that your Majesty takes supreme delight in religious devotions; and, to tell the truth, I have always had a strong hankering that gate mysel’, and hope I will hae till the day of my death. But there is ae thing in the whilk I am greatly altered. Pray, may I take the liberty to ask what is your Majesty’s opinion about the deil?’

‘Uh! gracious St Mary be with us! What a question, knight! Why, what can I think but that he is the great enemy of God and man, and the author of universal evil?’

‘There I think differently,’ said Charlie, bowing very low: ‘Always begging my lady queen’s gracious pardon, that’s the only tenet o’ my belief that is altered; – at least an it be nae fairly altered, it is considerably jumbled, and nought like sae steadfast as it was. Always begging your pardon though, madam.’

‘I am quite confounded,’ said the Queen. ‘Pray, warrior, what do you mean?’

‘Plainly this, my lady queen; that I think the old gentleman has been sair abused; and that there are some na meikle better than him wha have been a great deal better ca’d. It may sound a little odd in your ears, but I hae now seen him. I hae sat wi’ him; I hae eaten, I hae drunken wi’ him; and gin it hadna been for the interference of women, we wad hae partit civilly. But whenever they get a finger in a pye, there will be some ane burnt in the opening o’t. Always begging your Majesty’s pardon, though.’

The Queen crossed herself, and counted her beads; but at the same time bestowed a smile and look of admiration on this extraordinary hero who had accomplished such singular adventures. These encouraging Sir Charles to finish his sentence, he added: ‘They hae frightit me wi’ him lang; and sair has my neb been hauden at the grindstane wi’ the fear o’ him. I durst hardly say or think that ane of a’ the members of my body was my ain wi’ perfect terror. But thae days are a’ o’er. An’ the bedesmen be gaun to fright me only langer wi’ a deil, they maun get a new ane; for the auld ane winna stand his ground to any extent wi’ me on that score. He has doubtless some bad qualities; some wicked vagaries about him; but, upon the whole, I hae met wi’ waur fellows.’

This introduction, in spite of Sir Ringan’s endeavours to waive the subject, led to the whole narrative of the transactions at Aikwood, of which the Queen and her maidens of honour were never wearied, although at the same time many an Ave Maria and Paternoster the subject cost them. When obliged, from the lateness of the hour, to desist listening to the agitating theme, the Queen was never at rest until it was renewed next day; nor even then till she had gone and visited the great hill of Eildon thus miraculously cleft asunder and divided into three; and even after quaking at the scene, she grew still more importunate in her inquiries, so that there was no satisfying her curiosity on the subject of the enchantments of Master Michael Scott all the time she remained in Roxburgh.

When she retired to her chamber that first night she inquired for a confessor, and the knight in waiting introduced the monk Benjamin; intimating, that since the capture of the castle he had been confessor-general to all within its walls. The Queen’s devotions that night were prolonged until an early hour next morning; nevertheless she arose from her sleep

greatly refreshed, and in high spirits, and at the breakfast-table was more than usually gay. Not so with Douglas, over whose countenance, in spite of all exertions to the contrary, hung a heavy gloom, as well as a manifest abstraction of thought. The King, who was a person of strong discernment, observed this, and, from some indefinite dread of the cause, involuntarily partook of the sensation.

CHAPTER 30

I want none of your gold, Douglas,
  I want none of your fee,
But swear by the faith of thy right hand
  That you'll love only me:
And I'll leave my country and my kin
  And wend along with thee.

May Marley

When the mass, and a plentiful morning meal, were over next day, every one began to prepare for such exercises as the season admitted. All lingered about for some time, but seeing that no orders were likely to be given out for any procession or general rendezvous during the day, which every one had expected, some betook them to the chace, others to equestrain exercises with sword and spear, while the Homes and the Gordons joined in an excursion into English ground, keeping along the southern bank of the Tweed. The King observing them all about to disperse, reminded the Douglas that it was a high festal day; on which the latter made a low obeisance, and remarked, that he was only now a guest in the castle of Roxburgh, and that his honoured liege sovereign was host; that his foresters and sumptuary officers had got timeous notice, and nothing would be lacking that his Majesty could desire for the entertainment of his nobles and friends. The King then caused it to be intimated, that he would be happy to meet all his lords and nobles in the banquet-hall at even-tide, where every knight, gentleman, and yeoman, were expected to attend in their several places, and all should be heartily welcome. 'And now, Lord Douglas,' said he, leading the way into an antichamber, 'let us two retire by ourselves, and consult what is to be done next.'

Lord Douglas followed, but ill prepared to answer the inquiries about to be put to him. He had received injunctions of secrecy from one who had in no instance misled him, and to whom he had been of late indebted for the

preservation of his life. But how was he now to conduct himself, or how answer his sovereign in any other way than according to the truth as it had been stated unto him? His predicament was a hard one; for he was, in the first place, ashamed of the part he had acted, of never having discovered his royal mistress while attached to his side, notwithstanding of all evidences in confirmation of the fact, which he had never once seen till too late. And then to have suffered even his mistress' page to fall a victim to such a shameful death, without either making an effort to save him, or so much as missing him from his hand, or mentioning his loss – were circumstances not quite consistent with the high spirit of gallantry, as well as chivalry, he had displayed at first by the perilous undertaking. Gladly would he have kept his knowledge of the transaction a secret; but then there was the monk Benjamin, who, by some supernatural agency, had been given to understand the whole scope and tenor of it; and there was dame Mary Kirkmichael knew the whole, except the degrading catastrophe, and had unfolded it all to him when it was too late. He ran over all these things in his mind, and was as little, as at any previous period, prepared what part to act, when the King turned round, and, in the most anxious and earnest manner, said, 'Lord Douglas, where is our daughter?'

'My liege lord and sovereign, ought not I rather to have asked that question of you?' said the Douglas: 'And I would have done it at our first meeting, only that I would not trifle with your feelings on such a serious matter, perceiving that you laboured under a grievous misconception regarding my conduct. You have not, it seems, brought the princess Margaret along with you, as was expected by all my friends and followers?'

'Not by yourself, I am certain. I say, Lord Douglas, where is my daughter? I demand a categorical answer.'

'Sire, in what way am I accountable for your daughter?'

'Lord Douglas, I hate all evasion. I request an answer as express as my question. I know my darling child, in admiration of your chivalrous enterprise, resolved, in the true spirit of this romantic age, to take some active part in the perils undertaken solely on her account: I know her ingenuity, which was always boundless, was instrumental in performing some signal services to you; and that finally she attached herself to your side in a disguise which she deemed would ensure her a kind and honourable protection. Thus far I know; and, though the whole was

undertaken and transacted without my knowledge, when I was absent in the Highlands, I am certain as to the truth of every circumstance; and I am farther certified that you know all this.'

'Hear me, my liege sovereign. Admitting that your daughter, or any other king's, lord's, or commoner's daughter, should put herself into a page's raiment, and—'

'Silence, lord!' cried the king, furiously, interrupting him: 'Am I to be mocked thus, and answered only with circumlocution, notwithstanding my express command to the contrary? Answer me in one word. My Lord of Douglas, where is my daughter?'

'Where God will, sire,' was the short and emphatic reply. The king eyed Douglas with a keen and stern regard, and the eagle eye of the latter met that of his sovereign without any abashment. But yet this look of the Douglas, unyielding as it was, manifested no daring or offensive pride; it was one rather of stern sorrow and regret; nevertheless he would not withdraw it, but, standing erect, he looked King Robert in the face, until the eyes of the latter were gradually raised from his toward heaven. 'Almighty Father!' cried he, clasping his hands together – 'Where, then, is it thy will that my beloved child should be? O Douglas! Douglas! In the impatience and warmth of temper peculiar to my race, I was offended at your pertinacity; but I dread it was out of respect to a father's feelings. I forgive it, now that I see you are affected, only, in pity to this yearning bosom, relate to me all that you know. Douglas! can you not inform me what has befallen to my daughter?'

'No, my liege, I cannot. I know nothing, or at least little save from report; but the little that I have heard, and the little that I have seen, shall never be reported by my tongue.'

'Then hope is extinct!' cried the King. 'The scene that can draw tears from the stern eye of the Douglas, even by an after reflection, is one unmeet for a parent's ear. The will of the Almighty be done! He hath given and he hath taken away: blessed be his name! But why have the men of my household, and the friends in whom I trusted, combined against my peace?' The King said this in a querulous mood. 'Why did you not tell me sooner?' cried he, turning to Douglas, his tone altering gradually from one of penitence and deep humiliation to one of high displeasure: 'Why bring me on this fool's errand, when I ought to have been sitting in sackcloth and

ashes, and humbling myself for the sins of my house? These must have been grievous indeed, that have drawn down such punishments on me. But the indifference of those in whom we trusted is the worst of all! O, my child! My darling child, Margaret! Never was there a parent so blest in a daughter as I was in thee! The playfulness of the lamb or the kid – the affection of the turtle-dove, were thine. Thy breast was all enthusiasm and benevolence, and every emotion of thy soul as pure as the ray of heaven. I loved thee with more than parental affection, and, if I am bereaved of thee, I will go mourning to my grave. Is there no one in this place that can inform me of my daughter's fate? Her lady confidant, I understand, is still lingering here. Send for her instantly. Send for her confessor also, that I may confront you altogether, and ascertain the hideous and unwelcome truth. If I cannot have it here, I shall have it elsewhere, or wo be to all that have either been instrumental in her fate or lax in warding it off! Do you think, Lord of Douglas, that I can be put off with a hum and a haw, and a shake of the head, and, "it's God's will?" Do you think I should, when I am inquiring about my own daughter, whom I held dearest of all earthly beings? No, I'll scrutinize it to a pin's point. I'll wring every syllable of the truth out of the most secret heart and the most lying tongue. I'll move heaven and hell, but I'll know every circumstance that has befallen to my daughter. Send, I say, for her foster-sister and faithful attendant, dame Mary Kirkmichael. Send also for her confessor, and for all to whom she has but once spoken since she arrived here. Why are they not sent for before this time?'

'My liege lord, restrain your impatience. They are sent for; but they will tell you nothing that can mitigate your sorrow. If it be all true that has been told to me, and that you yourself have told to me, of the disguise the Princess assumed, then it is also true that you will never again see your daughter in this state of existence.'

'Ah! is it even so! Then is the flower of the realm fallen! then is the solace of my old age departed! But she is happy in the realms of blessedness. While love, joy, and truth are the delight of heaven, there will my Margaret find a place! O, that she had staid by her father's hand! Why was my jewel entrusted to the care and honour of those who care but for themselves, and who have suffered the loveliest flower of the world to be cropped in its early blossom? nay, left it to be sullied and trodden down in forgetfulness. Lord Douglas, did you see my daughter perish?'

‘Now, my liege lord, can I act the man no longer. Forgive me; and may the holy Virgin, the mother of God, forgive me; for I indeed saw with these eyes that inestimable treasure cut off, without one effort on my part to save her, and without a tear wetting my cheeks.’

‘Then, may all the powers of darkness blast thy soul, thou unfeeling traitor! Thus! thus will I avenge me on the culprit who could give up his sovereign’s daughter, and his own betrothed bride, to a violent death, and that without a tear! O thou incarnate fiend! shalt thou not bewail this adown the longest times of eternity? Darest thou not draw against an injured father and king?’

‘Put up thy sword, sire. The Douglas draws not but on his equals, and thou art none of them. Thy person is sacred and thy frame debilitated. He holds thee inviolate; but he holds thee also as nothing!’

‘Thou shalt know, proud lord, that the King of Scotland fears no single arm, and that he can stand on one limb to avenge the blood of his royal house.’

‘My gracious lord, this is the mere raving of a wounded spirit, and I grieve that I should have for one moment regarded it otherwise than with veneration. I had deserved to die an hundred deaths, if I had known who the dear sufferer was; but, alas! I knew not ought of the sex or rank of my page, who was taken prisoner in the great night engagement. But I can tell you no more, Sire; nor is it needful; you now know all. I am guiltless as the babe unborn of my royal mistress’s blood; but I will never forgive myself for my negligence and want of perception; nor do I anticipate any more happiness in this world. I have been laid under some mysterious restraints, and have suffered deeply already. And now, my gracious lord, I submit myself to your awards.’

‘Alas, Lord Douglas, you are little aware of the treasure you have lost. Your loss is even greater than mine. It behoves us, therefore, to lament and bewail our misfortunes together, rather than indulge in bitter upbraidings.’

Here they were interrupted by the entrance of the Queen, who brought with her the Lady Jane Howard, dressed in a style of eastern magnificence, to introduce her to the King. The King, amid all the grief that overwhelmed his spirit, was struck with her great beauty, and paid that respect and homage to her which high birth and misfortune always command from the truly great; and the Queen, with the newfangledness of her sex, appeared

wholly attached to this captive stranger, and had brought her down at that time to intercede with the King and Lord Douglas for her liberty, loading her with commendations and kind attentions. To check the Queen's volatility of spirits, the King informed her shortly of the irreparable loss both of them had suffered, but the effect was manifestly not at all proportionate to the cause. She appeared indeed much moved, and had well nigh fallen into hysterics; but if her grief was not assumed, it bore strong symptoms of being so. She first railed at, and then tried to comfort the Douglas; but finally turned again to Lady Jane, (who wept bitterly, out of true sympathy, for the Princess's cruel and untimely fate,) and caressed her, trying to console her in the most extravagant terms. The King, on the other hand, sobbed from his inmost soul, and bewailed his loss in terms so pathetic and moving, that the firm soul of Douglas was overcome, and he entered into all his Sovereign's feelings with the keenest sensations. It was a scene of sorrow and despair, which was rather increased than mitigated by the arrival of two more who had lately been sent for. These were the monk Benjamin and the lady Mary Kirkmichael, whom the King began anew to examine, dwelling on every circumstance that occurred during the course of his darling child's extravagant adventure with a painful anxiety. But every now and then he became heated with anger, blaming some one for the want of discernment or respect. When he came to examine the monk, who shewed great energy and acuteness of speech, he lost his temper altogether at some part of the colloquy; but the monk was not to be daunted; he repelled every invective with serenity of voice and manner, and at sundry times rather put the monarch to shame.

'Hadst thou ever an opportunity of confessing and shriving my child, previous to the time she fell into the hands of her enemies, reverend brother?'

'No Sire, she never made confession to me, nor asked absolution at my hand.'

'And wherefore didst thou not proffer it, thou shriveled starveling? Were there no grants to bestow? no rich benefices to confer for the well-being of a royal virgin's soul, that caused thee to withold these poor alms of grace? Who was it that bestowed on thy unconscionable order all that they possess in this realm? And yet thou wilt suffer one of their posterity to come into

thy cell, to ask thy assistance, without bestowing a mass or benediction for the sake of heaven.'

'Sire, it is only to the ignorant and the simple that we proffer our ghostly rites. Those who are enlightened in the truths and mysteries of religion it behoves to judge for themselves, and to themselves we leave the state of their consciences, in all ordinary cases.' The monk was robed in a very wide flowing grey frock, and cowled over the eyes, while his thin and effeminate-looking beard trembled adown his breast with the fervency of his address. As he said these last words, he stretched his right hand forth toward the King, and raising the left up behind him, his robe was by that means extended and spread forth in a manner that increased the tiny monk to triple the size he was before. 'And for you, King of Scotland,' added he, raising his keen voice that quavered with energy, 'I say such a demeanour is unseemly. Is it becoming the head and guardian of the Christian church in this realm – him that should be a pattern to all in the lower walks of life – thus to threat and fume beneath the chastening of his Maker? You ask me who bestowed these ample bounds on my order? I ask you in return who it was that bestowed them on thy progenitors and thee, and for what purpose? Who gave thee a kingdom, a people, and a family of thy own? Was it not he before whose altar thou hast this day kneeled, and vowed to be for him and not for another? And what he has bestowed has he not a right to require of thee again, in his own time, and in his own way?' The King bowed with submission to the truth of this bold expostulation, and the impetuous and undaunted monk went on: 'It is rather thy duty, most revered monarch, to bow with deep humiliation to the righteous awards of the Almighty, for just and righteous they are, however unequal they may appear to the purblind eyes of mortal men. If he has taken a beloved child from thee, rest assured that he has only snatched her from evil to come, and translated her to a better and a happier home. Why then wilt thou not acknowledge the justice of this dispensation, and rather speak comfort to the weaker vessels than give way to ill-timed and unkingly wrath?

'As for thee, noble lord, to the eyes of men thine may appear a hard lot indeed. For the love of one thou adventuredst thy life and the very existence of thy house and name. The stake was prodigious, and when thou hadst won it with great labour and perseverance, the prize was snatched from thy

grasp. Thy case will to all ages appear a peculiarly hard one; still there is this consolation in it—'

'There is no grain of consolation in it,' said Douglas interrupting him: 'There can be none! The blow on my head, and my hopes of happiness, is irretrievable.'

'Yes lord, there is,' said the monk; 'for has it not been decreed in heaven above, that this union was never to be consummated? Man may propose and scheme and lay out plans for futurity, but it is good for him that the fulfilment is vested in other hands than his. This then is consolation, to know that it was predestinated in the counsels of one who cannot err, that that royal maid never was to be thine; and therefore all manner of repining is not only unmanly and unmeet, but sinful. It behoves now thy sovereign, in reward of thy faithful services, to bestow on thee another spouse with the same dowry he meant to bestow on his daughter. And it behoves you to accept of this as the gift of heaven, proffered to thee in place of the one it snatched from thy grasp. As its agent, therefore, and the promoter of peace, love, and happiness among men, I propose that King Robert bestow upon thee this noble and high born dame for thy consort. Both of you have been bereaved of those to whom you were betrothed, and it cannot fail to strike every one that this seems a fortune appointed for you two by Providence; nor can I form in my mind the slightest objection that can be urged to it on either side. It is desirable on every account, and may be the means of promoting peace between the two sister kingdoms, wasted by warfare and blood, which every true Christian must deplore. I propose it as a natural consequence, and a thing apparently foreordained by my master; and give my voice for it. King and Queen of Scotland what say you?'

'I hold the matter that this holy and enlightened brother has uttered to be consistent with truth, reason, and religion,' said the King – 'and the union has my hearty and free approval. I farther promise to behave to this lady as a father to a daughter, and to bestow upon our trusty and leal cousin, the Lord Douglas, such honours, power, and distinction as are most due for the great services rendered to this realm. The match has my hearty concurrence.'

'And mine,' said the Queen: 'I not only acquiesce in the reverend brother's proposal, but I lay my commands on my noble kinsman the Lord Douglas to accept of this high boon of heaven.'

‘Pause my sovereign lady,’ said the Douglas, ‘before you proceed too far. In pity to the feelings that rend this bosom, let me hear no more of the subject at present. In pity to that lovely and angelic lady’s feelings, that must be acute as my own, I implore that you will not insist farther in this proposal. Do not wound a delicate female breast, pressed down by misfortunes.’

‘This is something like affectation, Lord Douglas,’ rejoined the Queen: ‘If I answer for the lady Jane’s consent, what have you then to say against this holy brother’s proposal?’

‘Ay, if your Queen stand security for the lady’s consent, and if *I stand security for it likewise*,’ said the monk – ‘what have you to say against the union then? Look at her again, lord. Is not she *a lovely* and *angelic* being? Confess the truth now. For I know it to be the truth, that never since you could distinguish beauty from deformity, have your eyes beheld *so lovely* and *so angelic* a lady? Pressed down by misfortunes, too! Does that not add a triple charm to all her excellencies? You know what has been done for her? what has been suffered for her? what a noble and gallant life was laid down for her? Was such a sacrifice ever made for a lady or princes of your own country? No, never, heroic lord! Therefore bless your stars that have paved out a way for your union with such a *lovely, angelic*, and *matchless lady*; and take her! take her to your longing and aching bosom.’

‘Moderate your fervour, holy brother,’ said the Douglas, ‘which appears to me rather to be running to unwarrantable extremes. Granting that the lady Jane Howard is perhaps unequalled in beauty and elegant accomplishments —’

‘Is she not so? Is she not so?’ cried the monk with a fervour that raised his voice to a scream of passion: ‘Did I not say that she was? And now am I not warranted by your own sentiments, *freely expressed* enough. Sure, lord, you cannot deny that I said, that I told you, the lady was *peerless in beauty and accomplishments*? I knew it, and told you before that she was *the queen of beauty*. Why then do you hesitate, and make all this foolish opposition to an union which we all know you are eager to consummate? Yes, you are: And we all know it. You are!’

‘Holy brother, what unaccountable phrenzy has seized upon you,’ said the Douglas; ‘and why all this extravagant waste of declamation? Let me not hear another sentence, nor another word on the subject: only suffer me

to finish what I had begun. I say then, granting that the lady Jane were peerless in beauty and accomplishments, still there is an impression engraven on my heart that can never be removed, or give place to another; and there will I cherish it as sacred, till the day of my death. And, that no reckless importunity may ever be wasted on me again, here I kneel before the holy rood, which I kiss, and swear before God and his holy angels, that since I have been bereaved of the sovereign mistress of my heart and all my affections – of her in whom all my hopes of happiness in this world were placed, and who to me was all in all of womankind – that, never shall another of the sex be folded in the arms of Douglas, or call him husband! So help me thou Blessed One, and all thy holy saints and martyrs, in the performance of this vow!'

During the time of this last speech and solemn oath, the sobs of the monk Benjamin became so audible that all eyes were turned to him, for they thought that his delicate frame would burst with its emotions. And, besides, he was all the while fumbling about his throat, so that they dreaded he had purposed some mortal injury to himself. But in place of that, he had been unloosing some clasps or knots about his tunick: for with a motion quicker than thought, he flung at once his cowl, frock, and beard away – and there stood arrayed as a royal bride the Princess Margaret of Scotland! 'Journeyer of earth, where art thou now?'

Yes; there stood, in one moment, disclosed to the eyes of all present, *the princess Margaret Stuart herself*, embellished in all the ornaments of virgin royalty, and blooming in a glow of new born beauties.

'Thank heaven I have been deceived!' cried she, with great emphasis; and when she had said this, she stood up motionless by the side of Lady Jane Howard, and cast her eyes on the ground. No pen can do justice to the scene. It must be left wholly to conception, after the fact is told that no one present had the slightest conception of the disguise save the Queen, who had been initiated into the princess's project of trying the real state of the Douglas's affections on the preceding night. It was like a scene of enchantment, such as might have been produced at the castle of Aikwood. But a moment ago all was sorrow and despair; now all was one burst of joyful surprise. And, to make it still more interesting, there stood the two rival beauties of Scotland and England, side by side, as if each were vying with the other for the palm to be bestowed on her native country. But to this

day the connoisseurs in female beauty have never decided whether the dark falcon eyes and lofty forehead of the one, or the soft blushing roses and blue liquid eyes of the other, were the most irresistible.

The King was the first to burst from the silence of surprise. He flew to his daughter's arms with more vigour than a cripple could well be supposed to exert, kissed and embraced her, took her on his knee and wept on her neck; then, striking his crutch on the floor, he scolded her most heartily for the poignant and unnecessary pain she had occasioned to him. 'And the worst of it is,' added he, 'that you have caused me show too much interest in an imp that has been the constant plague of my life with her whims and vagaries; an interest, and an intensity of feeling, that I shall be ashamed of the longest day I have to live.'

'Indeed but you shall not, my dear lord and father, for I will now teaze another than you, and teaze him only to deeds of valour and renown; to lead your troops to certain conquest, till you are fully avenged of the oppressors of your people.'

Mary Kirkmichael hung by her seymar and wept. The Douglas kneeled at her feet, and in an ecstacy took her hand and pressed it to his lips. 'I do not know whether or not I shall have reason to bless heaven all my life for this singular restoration,' said he; 'but for the present I do it with all my heart. Tell me, thou lovely cameleon, what am I to think of this? Wert thou indeed, as was related to me, the page Colin Roy Macalpin? He with the carroty locks and the flippant tongue?'

'You need not doubt it, lord Douglas. I was. And I think during our first intimacy that I teazed you sufficiently,'

'Then that delicate neck of yours, for all its taper form and lily hue is a charmed one, and rope proof; for, as sure as I look on you now, I saw you swing from a beam's end on the battlement of this same tower.'

'Oh! no, no, my lord! It was not I. Never trust this head again if it should suffer its neck to be noosed. *You* suffered it though; that you must confess. And I dare say, though a little sorry, felt a dead weight removed from about your neck. You suffered me to be taken prisoner out of your tent, and mured up among rude and desperate men in a dungeon. It cost me all my wits then to obtain my release. But I effected it. Swung from a beam's end, quoth he! Och! what a vulgar idea! No my lord, the page whom you saw swung was *a tailor's apprentice*, whom I hired to carry a packet up to your lordship, with

my green suit of clothes, and a promise of a high place of preferment, and I kept my word to the brat! An intolerable ape it was. Many better lives have been lost in this contention; few of less value – I never deemed he was so soon to be strung, and my heart smote me for the part I had acted. But the scheme of turning monk and confessor suited me best of all: I then got my shacles of mystery riveted on you; and, heaven! what secrets I have found out.'

At this part of the narrative, Isaac the curate bestows a whole chapter and a half on the description of the wedding, and all the processions, games, and feasting that ensued; but as none of these things bore the slightest resemblance to ought that has ever been witnessed in the present age, like a judicious editor I have passed them over. Suffice it that the Border never witnessed such splendor of array, such tournaments, such feasting, and such high wassail. For why? because it never witnessed the marriage of a king's daughter before. The streets of the city, and the square of the fortress, that had so lately been dyed with blood, now 'ran red with Rhenish wine.' And be it farther known, that Sir Charles Scott and his horse Corbie bore off every prize in the tilting matches, till at last no knight would enter the lists with him; but the fair dames were all in raptures with the gallantry of his bearing, and the suavity of his manners. As for the Queen, she became so much enamoured of the hero, that she was scarcely to be kept in due bounds, and if she had not been advanced in years he might have deemed she was in love with him. In the lists she drew up her snow-white palfrey by Corbie's side, and in the revel hall the royal dame herself was sure to be at the knight's side, except when at table, on pretence of hearing something more about his perils at Aikwood, and in particular about the scene with the beautiful and splendid witches; at which, as Sir Charles related it with abashed countenance, the Queen and her Maries laughed till the salt tears ran from their eyes. As for the description of their appearance the succeeding morning, and the feelings of the warrior, both then and afterwards when transformed to a huge bull, these never failed to throw the gamesome group into convulsions of mirth. In short, the knight of Raeburn was of all the gallants quite the favourite at that splendid festival in the hall, as well as the hero in the lists, in which he six times received the prize of honour from the hands of the royal bride and those of Lady Jane Howard,

who, at the Queen's earnest request was made principal bride's-maid, and presiding lady at the sports.

But if Charles was the hero of those engaged in the games, his friend the gospel friar was as completely so among the gay onlookers, and created them more sport often than all in the lists. Ever since the various affrays in which his mule had been engaged, and come off with such decided success, the mongrel had learned to value himself solely as a beast of warfare, and no man who rode near him was sure of keeping his seat a minute, especially if he rode a high mettled and capricious charger. By the side of a horse of modesty that bore himself with candour and humility of countenance, the mule was a beast of sociality and decorum; but whenever he saw a steed begin to cut any unnecessary capers, he deemed himself insulted or put to the challenge, and on the instant began to lay back his long ears and switch with his tail, while his grey sunk eyes emitted a hellish gleam. It was no matter at what distance such a horse made his appearance, if the mule disliked his deportment, he would have flown across a whole field to attack and humble him. He had borne his master headlong into so many unpremeditated and unwarrantable scuffles since his return from Aikwood, that he had bestowed on him the name of Goliah of Gath; and besides giving him that veteran title, he often averred that he believed one of the necromancer's imps of darkness had taken possession of his beast.

The friar had, however, learned to distinguish all his motions, and knew from these the exact points and stages of his irritation; and when his offence began to reach its acme, he had no other resource than that of wheeling his head forcibly around, and turning his tail toward the object of his displeasure. Without this precaution, the friar would have been carried into the lists every day merely to gratify the spleen of Goliah, who could not endure the curvetting and jangling that was going on there. And even this inverse precaution did not at all times prove effectual, as in the following pleasant instance.

It chanced one day that the knight of Kraeland entered the lists alone, no opponent appearing against him, owing to some mistake made in the arrangement by the officers. He was a goodly youth, but uplifted above the earth with vanity, and of his vapouring and airs there were no end. Imagining that he attracted the eyes of all the beholders, and elated because no one had the courage to appear against him, for so he affected to regard

the circumstance, he paraded the circle round and round, brandished his lance, and made his horse to curvette, rear, and wheel, accomplishing many grand evolutions. The lookers on were all beginning to get sick of him, and to view his vapourous manoeuvres with disdain, but amongst them all there was none so much moved with spleen as Goliah of Gath. From the first moment that the knight entered the lists that uncircumcised Philistine began to manifest a mortal dislike towards him: the more so it was believed that he was mounted on a milkwhite steed, a colour peculiarly disagreeable to the mule's optics. The judges of the games wist not what to do, and appealed to the King, who gave it as his opinion that this unchallenged appearance should be accounted as a victory, and that the knight should take his course in the next round; and the heralds got directions to make proclamation accordingly.

But long before this period the friar had been compelled to turn away the face of Goliah from this scene of vanity, and, as chance would have had it, he was in the innermost circle, so that retreat outward through the innumerable files was utterly impracticable, and there sat the gruff uncourtly form of the gospel friar, with the tail of his beast where the head should have been, to the great amusement of the spectators. For all this the malevolent eye of Goliah, as well accustomed to look backward as forward, perceived all the outrageous rearings and snortings of that proud and gaudy animal, and became moved with so much indignation that he would no longer be restrained, either by bit or spur, soothing or threatening. Just as the herald had taken his place to make proclamation, the mule fell a running backward; and the more fiercely that the friar spurred, and the more bitterly he threatened, the beast of Belial retrograded the faster, till at last, after two or three intemperate plunges, he got his head straight to the white charger, and then in one moment he was upon him, and had him by the brisket with his teeth. The horse reared furiously, but the mule pressed still closer to him, fixing his long teeth in the horse's shoulder, till on a sudden, in an attempt to clear both Goliah and his rider, or, at least, to leap over the mule's neck, the white steed was overturned, and thrown right on his back, above his overweening rider. All this was transacted in a space of time shorter than the time taken up in reading the relation; and the moment that Goliah of Gath had achieved this overthrow, he wheeled about with a mettledness and inveteracy beyond all description, and attacked the couple

with his heels, prostrate as they were, yerk for yerk, indiscriminately. The friar sunk the rowels of his spurs to the head in his sides, and uttered some strong declamatory sentences against him in the style of the nations of the East; but Goliah plied his iron-heels still the faster, although he groaned, as he kicked, in the bitterness of his spirit. The scene was perfectly irresistible, grievous as the consequences threatened to be on the one side. The lists were all in convulsions of laughter, and involuntary shouts of applause shook the storeys of the firmament. The King laughed till he sunk down in his litter, and his attendants had some fears that he would expire in a convulsive fit. The knight of Kraeland was carried out of the lists, maimed, and in a state of insensibility; and the friar, maugre all he could advance in opposition to the award, was proclaimed the victor in that course, and obliged to appear in the next encounter in opposition to the knight who had been the conqueror in the preceding combat.

Had Goliah of Gath restrained his wrath when this conquest was achieved, it would have been all very well, save for Kraeland and his white charger; but the mongrel's wrath once aroused was not easily abated. Therefore, when the friends of the fallen knight and his squire forced the Philistine to forego his attack and battery, his gleaming eyes glanced all around for another proper object whereon to wreak his horrid revenge. Now it so happened, that the Queen and her Maries were all mounted on white palfreys; and as these stood in the inner circles, arching their proud necks, and champing the bits, he was moved with choler against them, and resolved within himself to give them a surprise, and shew them the prowess of a veteran warrior; for, over and above their saucy demeanor, the glaring whiteness of colour that pervaded them and their riders his heart could not endure: And, besides all these, the shouts and laughter of the multitude were thought to have added greatly to his ire. The friar, who knew him well, said so; 'for' added he, 'the shouts of joy and laughter are unto him as a portion of gall and of worm-wood.' Certes, when he was driven from the prostrate champion, by dint of club and lance, he straightway laid back his long ears, and with a swiftness hardly imaginable, scoured the plain to the attack of the dames and their strutting genets. The friar soon perceived the dangerous dilemma into which he was about to be precipitated; and, all unable to restrain this champion of the Philistines, he cried out with a loud voice, 'O wretched man that I am! lo, I shall work destruction among the daughters of

women! Will no man come to the assistance of those who have no strength of man at all? Wo is me! will the mighty men stand and look on till the daughters of their people are cut off from the face of the earth?'

Long ere this sentence had proceeded out of the friar's mouth, the work of deray and confusion was begun. The column of white palfreys were routed in one moment, and their gentle and affrighted riders kicked off in pairs, like so many diving swans. Never was there a warrior like Goliah of Gath! for he tore with his teeth, and struck with both hind feet and fore feet, all at the same instant. The Queen of Scotland would in all probability have been laid low with the rest, had it not been for the prowess of her favourite hero, who sprung from Corbie's back, and seized the audacious mule by the bridle. 'Smite him, my son!' cried the friar, with a loud voice: 'Draw thou forth thy sword, and smite him to the earth, for it is better for him to die than to live.'

The mule thought to prove contumacious at the first; but feeling Charlie's powerful grasp, he calmed himself, turned the one ear back, the other forward, and switched his tail, listening with much gratification to the hysterical cries of the discomfited damsels. Not so his master, who was grieved in spirit, and very wroth with his old servant and companion; insomuch that when he alighted from his back, and seized his curb, he exclaimed, 'O thou limb of the wicked one! Thou emblem of the evil principle working in the children of disobedience! What shall I do unto thee? Lo, now, if I had a sword in mine hand, would I not strike thy head from off thy body, and cause thee to be buried with the burial of an ass?' The mule let his ears fall down very wide asunder, like the horns of a Lancashire ox, putting on a face of great humility, as he looked out from beneath his heavy eyebrows, with many a sly demure glance at the friar's face. The good man led him around the lists in search of an opening to get out, for he durst not again mount him for fear of being instrumental in some farther outrage among the ranks of the great and the noble. As he passed by the King, his Majesty caused him to be called up into his presence, and asked him what sum it would please him to ask as the price of his mule?

'Verily, my lord, O King,' answered the friar, with great readiness, 'that beast hath been unto thy servant as a friend and an inheritance. He hath borne me over the mountains of Palestine, and hath drunk from the fords of Jordan, as well as from Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus. Yea,

bestriding that woful beast, hath thy servant fought the battles of the cross; and the hooves that have in thy sight been lifted up against the fair and the lovely, the meek and the innocent, have been dyed red in the blood of infidels. Money is of no avail to thy servant; and he cannot part with his old and trusty companion, even though the spirit of those that are cursed from the heavens be in him.'

'Then wilt thou come thyself unto me at the Scottish court?' said the King to him, somewhat in his own style – 'and I will cherish both thee and thy doughty companion, and thou shalt minister unto me in holy things, and shalt be unto me as a father, and I and my children will be to thee as sons and as daughters; for my trusty and well tried friend, Sir Ringan of Mountcomyn, saith well of thee and of thy great wisdom, valour, and prudence.'

'Verily, most noble King, I have yet many things to accomplish in other lands than this, which, by the strength of the Lord, must be fulfilled; when these are finished, then shall thy servant come unto thee, and visit thee for good.'

'And thou shalt be a welcome guest,' said the King: 'Wear thou this ring for my sake, which I give thee as a pledge of friendship, and of protection through my kingdom. Remain in the lists, for thou hast yet battle to do against two knights of the lance and the sword.'

'Lo, I will even strike with the sword and the spear, if my lord the King commandeth it. But I lack armour, and am not a man of war, save when the lives of the innocent or the cause of the cross is at stake. And, moreover, the beast that thou seest is as a beast of the bottomless pit; he hath antipathies and sympathies of his own; and instead of bearing me full force against my opponent, he may carry me to make war against women and children. Nevertheless, I will do all that it behooveth me to do. Who are my adversaries?' – He was told they were the knights of Gemelscleuch and Raeburn –. 'Then God do so to me, and more also, if I lift up my hand against any of these my brethren, the men of my right hand, and the preservers of my life. Neither will one of them put his spear in rest against me; so that the battle would perish. Thy servant is not afraid to fight, but as a gladiator he is unwilling to exhibit; therefore my lord, O King, suffer him to depart in peace.'

These reasons were cogent, so the King admitted them; and the worthy and heroic friar was suffered to lead off Goliah of Gath, amid thundering shouts of applause.

CHAPTER 31

> This general doctrine of the text explained, I proceed, in what remains of this discourse, to point out to you three important and material considerations concerning the nature and character of woman. These shall be, 1*stly*, What she was; 2*dly*, What she is; and, 3*dly*, What she will be hereafter. And are not these, my brethren, matters of high importance?
>
> *Dickson's Sermons*

All things of this world wear to an end, saith Isaac; so also did this high Christmas festival within the halls and towers of Roxburgh. The lady Jane had borne a principal share in all the sports, both in and out of doors. In the hall she was led up to every dance, and in the lists she presided as the queen of the games, distributing the prizes with her own fair hands to the Scottish heroes, and, of course, crowning her old friend Charlie with the bays at least once a day. Sir Charles was a most unassuming character, and seldom adventured on addressing his superiors first. But when once they addressed discourse to him, he never failed answering them with perfect ease and unconcern; and often, as is well known ere this time, with more volubility than he himself approved of. Once, and only once during all these days of his triumph and high honours, did the lady Jane remember him of having brought her into captivity, and of the high bribe he had refused for her liberty. 'An' if it be your will, honoured lady, I wish ye wadna say ony mair about that matter,' said Sir Charles; 'for mony queer fidgetty kind o' feelings I hae had about it sinsyne. And if I had kend then what I ken now – if I had kend wha I had in my arms, and what I had in my arms, I had nae borne the honours that I wear the day. My heart had some sair misgiving aince about you, when there were hard news gaun of your great jeopardy; but now that you are in sic high favour, I am e'en glad that I brought you, for troth ye hae a face and a form that does ane good to look at.'

The lady Jane only sighed at this address, and looked down, thinking, without doubt, of the long and dismal *widowhood* which it would behoove

her to keep for the dismal end of her betrothed knight, and then a virgin widowhood too, which was the worst of all. There was an obscure glimpse of the same sort of ideas glanced on Charlie's mind as he viewed her downcast blushing countenance; and afraid of giving birth to any painful sensations in such a lovely lady's mind, he desisted from further conversation.

The Queen was still so much interested in that lady as to endeavour by all means to procure her liberty without any ransom, somewhat contrary to her son-in-law's opinion. The Queen reasoned, that she was not a lawful prisoner of war; the Douglas that she was, there being no bond of peace subsisting between the nations, and she entering Scotland with forged credentials, at least signed and sealed in favour of another and non-existing person. She applied to the King, who gave his consent, but, at the same time, professed having nothing to do in the matter. At length she teazed Lord Douglas so much that he resolved to indulge her Majesty before the court took leave of him, but to leave it until the very last day. He, however, reckoned before his host; for now that the abbot of Melrose had conjoined him with royalty, he found that he had at the very least two to please instead of one.

Here, we must, with that regard to veracity which so well becomes every narrator of a true tale, divulge a disagreeable secret; that is, we must delineate truly a trait in the character of our heroine, the lady Douglas, (lately the princess Margaret of Scotland,) which we would rather have concealed, had it been possible to have done so. But she could not conceal it any longer herself – and why should Isaac and I vex ourselves about it; for one day when Mary Kirkmichael waited on her in her chamber, she found her drowned in tears, and with great perplexity, and no less curiosity, set herself to discover the cause.

'What? My dearest and most noble lady in tears?' exclaimed she. 'Now, a plague on these teazing, battling, boisterous, deluding creatures called men, that will not let poor innocent maids alone to live at heart's ease, but hold them thus in constant ferment, married or unmarried! Well did I ween from experience, that the maiden's troubles were the most insufferable to be borne! The neglects – the disappointed hopes – the fears – and, above all, the jealousies! Oh these jealousies! What infernal tormentors they are! But now little wot I what to say, or what to think; for beshrew me if I remember

the time when I saw my royal mistress in tears before. Let me recollect. No, not since dame Mary Malcolm's palfrey leaped the ravine before the lords of Huntly and Athol, and yours refused. Then, indeed, you wept; and when I laughed you struck me. Yes, you know you struck me, and that had nearly made matters worse.'

'Pray, madam,' said lady Douglas, 'could you conveniently command yourself so far as to bring a surgeon here on the instant?'

'A surgeon! Sanct Marie's grace! what is your ailment, my dearest lady?'

'It is not for myself, it is for you I want him. You are very ill of a quinsey, dame, and bleeding below the tongue is necessary. Go bring my father's leech to me, without delay, and come with him.'

'You have not forgot your sweet maiden frolics for all that is come and all that is done. Well, I am glad you are still in that whimsical humour. I was afraid you were grievously vexed or disappointed at something in your new state.'

'Step forth, I say, and bring me in a surgeon, for I insist on having you bleeded under the tongue. You are very ill indeed, and the disease is infectious.'

'By my maidhood, and by your own, sweet lady, (the Douglas's I mean,) there shall no leech that ever drew lancet open a vein in my blessed and valuable member. No, not were it to humour a queen, or a *lady Jane Howard*.'

'Now, may all the plagues that prey on the heart of woman seize and torment thee if thou hast not guessed the cause of my uneasiness. There's a latent devil within thee that whispers to thy imagination the thoughts that are passing in my heart. O Kirkmichael, I am ill! I have suffered many distresses in my time! many, many distresses!'

'Yes, indeed you have, my royal mistress! many, many distresses!'

'Bring the surgeon, I say. Cannot you, for the life of you, compose yourself for a little space, when you see me in such distress? Your royal mistress, Mary? I am no royal mistress now! No, I a'nt! Nothing but a plain jog-trot wife of a lord, or earl, or how do you call that beautiful title? While the lady Jane Howard! – Oh Kirkmichael, I cannot tell you the half of what I feel!'

'I know it all. Jealousy! my dear lady, jealousy! Think you I know not what it is to suffer that? Do you remember young Spinola, that came to our

court from the places abroad? He loved me the best after all; I had certain demonstrative proofs of it. But do you know what I suffered? Racks, tortures, strangulations! Fiends tearing out my eyes, pouring hellebore into my ears, and boring through my heart with red hot irons! Not know what jealousy is? Was not I telling your royal self the last minute—'

'Mary! stop, and be advised. You are very ill.'

'I humbly ask forgiveness. I was coming to it. Dear lady, I have noted your trouble these nine days past, and that it was still gaining ground. But I can partly account for it, so that, with a little prudence and patience, it may be removed. Ever since the day on which you was a bride, or the one following perhaps, there has been more court and more flattery paid to the southern beauty than to the northern one. It is the course of nature, madam; you are now a married wife, and your charms must be admired at a distance with respect and awe. The maid must still be courted and flattered. Quite natural, madam, I assure you. Think you any knight durst caper and bow, and prate to the lady Douglas, as they do to *the English puppet*?'

'Mary, I will give you all my wedding apparel for these two last words. Is not she a mere puppet, without soul or magnanimity? But – Mary! – How gladly would I change places with her, Mary! She has conquered after all. Yes: She has conquered Margaret Stuart, there is no denying of it to one's own heart.'

'Gramercy, dearest lady, are you not raving? Has not the noble lord of your adoption proved victorious, and gained you with all honour and approbation?'

'But then the lord of *her* adoption *died* for her, Mary. Think of that. The gallant, faithful, and magnanimous Musgrave *died* for the mistress of his affections. But who died for the poor degraded Lady Margaret of Scotland? I am conquered with my own weapons. There is no denying of it! I would rather that one lover had laid down his life for me than have had fifty husbands.'

'Palpably wrong! I'll prove it. Fifty husbands! How delightful – beg pardon, madam.'

'I tried the Douglas hardly for it. But he was too selfish, and would not die for me. Base, cruel knight! No, he *would not* die for me; even though I got him to believe that I was put to death, and my ghost haunting him, yet he *would not* kill himself. What a value those monstrous men set upon their

lives! Musgrave died. Lady Jane has conquered, and I am *married*! I wish I were dead, Kirkmichael!'

''Tis a pity but that you were, madam! If ladies are to live on these terms with the world, they had better be out of it. For you know if the man that one loves best will not condescend always to die when the gratification of his mistress' vanity requires it, why there is an end of all endurance. I managed otherwise with young Spinola.'

'Mention the name of your Spinola again to me for the head that stands on your body, since you deprecate the more gentle prescription of bleeding below the tongue; and now find me some anodyne without delay for the distemper that is preying on my vitals. None of your jeers and your jibes, Kirkmichael, for I am not in humour to bear them. The worst thing of all is yet to come. This puppet – this painted doll – this thing of wax! after triumphing over me in my own country and among my own people – after being died for, while I was only lived for – after being courted, and flattered, and smiled on, while I was only bowed to and gazed on – after being caressed by my father, and bedaubed with praises by my newfangled and volatile mother – after all this, I say, there is she going to be set at liberty, and without all question wedded to one of the royal dukes, one of the princes of the blood! How shall the blood of the Bruce and the spirit of the Stuart brook this? Before I heard of that lady's name, I knew not what jealousy was. Ever since that time has she held me in misery. I thought I had once achieved the greatest conquest that ever was accomplished by heroine. And I *did* seize a noble prize! How has it turned out? – in every instance to her honour, and my disparagement. And there, through the unnatural fondness of my doating mother, will she return home, and be courted for her princely fortune, not for her beauty I am sure! But then, they will hear that the bravest and most chivalorous knight in England *died for her*; and as certainly as I speak to you, will she achieve a higher marriage than Margaret, and how shall she ever show her face again?'

'A higher marriage than you, dearest lady? Then must she be married to some of the kings on the continent, for in all the dominion of England there is not a subject of such power as your lord, the Earl of Douglas and Mar, nor one whose military honours flourish so proudly.'

'My lord and husband is all that I could wish in man, only—'

'Only that he is *not dead*. That's all.'

‘You had better! *Only* I say that he is not a *prince of the blood royal*, Mary. Think of that. There are many such in England. And there to a certainty will my great and only rival be wedded to one of these. The Duke of York or Glocester, mayhap; or to Prince Henry, the heir of the house of Mortimer, and then she’ll be *a queen*! Yes, Kirkmichael! then she will be *queen of England*! – And I – what will I be? No more than plain *Lady Douglas*! The wife of *the Black Douglas*! – Och! what shall I do, Mary? I’ll go and wipe my shoes on her as long as I have it in my power.’

‘Marry for a small space; there is time enough for that afterward, my dearest lady. Be staid for a little while, till I tell you a secret. A very important and profound one it is, and it behoves you to know it. There is a certain distemper that young newly married ladies are subjected to, which is entitled PHRENZY, or some such delightful name. Some call it *derangement of intellect*, but that is too long a name, I hate long names, or very long things of any sort. So you must know, madam, that this delightful trouble, for it is delightful in its way, produces a great deal of animation. It is quite proper you should know this grand matrimonial secret, madam. This delicious, spirit-stirring trouble then soon goes off, and when it goes all the giddy vapours of youth fly with it. The mirror of the eye is changed, its convex being thence turned inward, reflecting all nature on the soul in a different light from that in which it had ever appeared before; and, at the same time the whole structure and frame of the character is metamorphosed, and the being that is thus transmuted becomes a more rational and respectable creature than it was previously; and at the same time a more happy one, although it must be acknowledged its happiness is framed on a different model. This is my secret, and it is quite proper that every *young* lady who is married should be initiated into it. As for the old ones, they are too wise to be initiated into any thing, or for any thing to be intiated into them.’

‘Now, you imagine you have said a very wise thing; and it is not without shrewdness. But I can add a principal part which you have wholly left out, and it is this: When the patient is labouring under this disease, it is absolutely necessary that she be indulged, and humoured in every one of her caprices, else her convalescence is highly equivocal. Don’t you acknowledge this?’

‘I grant it. And the first case that comes under my care I promise to abide by this prescription.’

‘That is spoken like yourself – like the trusty friend and confidante. What then is to be done? for something must be done, and that suddenly.’

‘That is easily decided. She must be kept in confinement. Kept here a prisoner at large, until she turn an old maid and lose a few of her fore-teeth. That will be delightful! Eh! Then make her believe all the time that it is a duty incumbent on her to remain in that widowed state for the sake of Musgrave – Hoh! beg pardon, madam!’

‘I charge you never to let that triumph of hers sound in my ears again. It creates the same feeling within me as if you informed me that an adder was laced in my stays. Kirkmichael, you never took any thing in hand that you did not accomplish for me. This lady must be retained for the present, till we can determine on some other course. I gave my lord a lesson about it already, but his reply was not only unsatisfactory but mortifying in the extreme. It has almost put me beside myself, and my pride will not suffer me to apply to him again.

‘My dearest love,’ said he, ‘I pray that you will not shew a sense of any inferiority by a jealousy of that unfortunate lady.’ Inferiority! I never had such a sentiment as a feeling of inferiority! What absurd notions these men imbibe. Is it possible, Mary, that I can have a sense of inferiority?’

‘No, no! quite impossible! Think no more of such antiquated and absurd apothegms as these. I will manage it for you. I take in hand to keep her as long as I live, if that will satisfy you. But are you sure that your brother will not fall in love with her, and marry her, and then she will be queen of Scotland?’

‘Ooh! – Oooh! Give me a drink, Mary. I am going into fits! Ooh! – Yes: as sure as you stand there, he will. The prince is his mother all over, newfangled and volatile in the extreme, and amorous to an intolerable degree. Disgustingly amorous, she is the very sort of food for his passion. Then her princely fortune, and the peace of the two realms! Oh! give me another drink, Mary; and bathe my hands – and my brow – That is kindly done. Queen of Scotland! Then I must pay court to her – perhaps be preferred as lady of the bedchamber. No, no. To the Scottish court she *must not go*!’

‘Be calm, my sweet lady! I have it. You shall assume your brother’s character once more – pay court to her – seduce her, and have her disgraced.’

‘What did you say, Kirkmichael? repeat that again. What did you say about disgracing? I am so very ill.’

‘O no! That scheme will not do. It will end ill! it will end ill! You are lady Douglas now, not the maiden princess. Why, I will get her married to one of your footmen for you. That will do.’

‘Prithee speak of things possible, and within some bounds of probability. If she were but married to a knight but one step below my lord in dignity, I would be satisfied. Nay, were that step only ideal it would give my heart content.’

‘Is that then so much to make such a pother about? I will accomplish it in two days. So difficult to get a maid of her complexion to marry? Difficulty in fattening – a pig! baiting a hook for a bagrel! – a stickleback! – a perch! I’ll do it in two days – in one day – in half a day, else never call me Mary Kirkmichael of Balmedie again. Difficulty in marrying a maid with light blue eyes – golden locks and rosy cheeks – with a languishing smile always on her countenance? and that maid an English one too? Peugh! Goodbye, my lady, Lady Black Douglas. I’m off. (Opening the door again.) It is a shame and a disgrace for any gentleman not to *die* for his mistress! I say it is! Young Spinola would have died for me cheerfully if I would have suffered him – that he would! Goodbye, madam.’

Mary was as busy all the remaining part of that day as ever was a bee in a meadow. She had private business with the Queen, and had art or interest enough to get two private audiences. She had business with the lady Jane Howard; a word to say to the King, and two or three to the lord Douglas – But it is a great loss that these important disclosures cannot be imparted here – for every word that she told to each of them was a profound secret! Not a word of it ever to be repeated till death! What a loss for posterity! It had one quality, there was not a word of truth in all this important disclosure; but an ingenious lie by a woman is much more interesting than one of her true stories. There was, however, one of Mary Kirkmichael’s secrets came to light, though none of those above-mentioned; and from the complexion of that, a good guess may be made at the matter of all the rest.

Sir Charles Scott, alias Muckle Charlie of Yardbire, was standing at the head of his hard-headed Olivers, his grimy Potts, and his skrae-shankit Laidlaws, in all amounting now to 140 brave and well appointed soldiers. He had them all dressed out in their best light uniform, consisting of deer-skin jackets with the hair outside; buckskin breeches, tanned white as snow, with the hair inside; blue bonnets as broad as the rim of a lady's spinning wheel, and clouted single-soaled shoes. He was training them to some evolutions for a grand parade before the King, and was himself dressed in his splendid battle array, with his plumes and tassels of gold. His bonnet was of the form of a turban, and his tall nodding plumes consisted of three fox tails, two of them dyed black, and the middle one crimson. A goodlier sight than Sir Charles at the head of his borderers, no eye of man (or woman either) ever beheld. As he stood thus giving the word of command, and brandishing the Eskdale souple by way of example, in the great square in the middle of the fortress, a little maid came suddenly to his side and touched him. Charles was extending his voice at the time, and the interruption made him start inordinately, and cut a loud syllable short in the middle. The maid made a low courtesy, while Charles stooped forward and looked at her as a man does who has dropt a curious gem or pin on the ground, and cannot find it. 'Eh? God bless us, what is't hinny? Ye war amaist gart me start.'

'My mistress requests a few minutes private conversation with you, sir knight.'

'Whisht dame! speak laigh,' said Sir Charles, half whispering, and looking raised-like at his warriors: 'Wha's your mistress, my little bonny dow? Eh? Oh you're nodding and smirking, are you? Harkee, It's no the auld Queen, is it? Eh?'

'You will see who it is presently, gallant knight. It is a matter of the greatest import to you, as well as your captain.'

'Ha! Gude faith, then it maunna be neglected. I'll be w'ye even now, lads; saunter about, but dinna quit this great four-nooked fauld till I come back again. Come along, then, my wee bonny hen chicken. Raux up an' gie me a grip o' your finger-ends. Side for side's neighbour like.' So away went Sir Charles, leading his tiny conductor by the hand, and was by her introduced into one of the hundred apartments in the citadel.

‘Our captain is gaun aff at the nail now,’ said Will Laidlaw; ‘Thae new honours o’ his are gaun to be his ruin. He’s getting far ower muckle in favour wi’ the grit fo’k.’

‘I wonder to hear ye speak that gate,’ said Gideon Pott of Bilhope: ‘I think it be true that the country says, that ye maun aye read a Laidlaw backward. What can contribute sae muckle to advance a gentleman and his friends as to be in favour with the great?’

‘I am a wee inclined to be of Laidlaw’s opinion,’ said Peter Oliver of the Langburnsheils, (for these three were the headsmen of the three names marshalled under Sir Charles) – ‘Sudden rise, sudden fa’; that was a saying o’ my grandfather’s, and he was very seldom in the wrong. I wadna wonder a bit to see our new knight get his head choppit off; for I think, if he haud on as he is like to do, he’ll soon be ower grit wi’ the Queen. Fo’k should bow to the bush they get bield frae, but take care o’ lying ower near the laiggens o’t. That was a saying o’ my grandfather’s aince when they wantit him to visit at the castle of Mountcomyn.’

‘There is he to the gate now,’ said Laidlaw, ‘and left his men, his breadwinners, in the very mids o’ their lessons; and as sure as we saw it, some o’ thae imps will hae his simple honest head into Hoy’s net wi’ some o’ thae braw women. Wha wins at their hands will lose at naething. I never bodit ony good for my part o’ the gowden cuishes and the gorget, and the three walloping tod tails. Mere eel-baits for catching herons!’

‘Ay weel I wat that’s little short of a billyblinder, lad!’ said Peter Oliver; ‘I trow I may say to you as my grandfather said to the ghost, “Ay, ay, Billy Baneless, ‘an a’ tales be true, yours is nae lie,” quo’ he; and he was a right auldfarrant man.’

But as this talk was going on among the borderers, Sir Charles, as before said, was introduced into a private chamber, where sat no less a dame than the officious and important lady of all close secrets, Mistress Mary Kirkmichael of Balmedie, who rose and made three low courtesies, and then with an affected faltering tongue and downcast look, addressed Sir Charles as follows: ‘Most noble and gallant knight – hem – Pardon a modest and diffident maiden, sir knight! – pink of all chivalry and hero of the Border: I say be so generous as to forgive the zeal of a blushing virgin for thus presuming to interrupt your warrior avocations –. (Sir Charles bowed –.) But, O knight – hem – there is a plot laying, or laid against your

freedom. Pray may I take the liberty to ask, Are you free of any love engagement?'

'Perfectly so, madam, at – hem!—'

'At my service. Come – that is so far well. You could not then possibly have any objections to a young lady of twenty-one or thereby, nobly descended, heir to seven ploughgates of land, and five half-davochs, and most violently in love with you.'

'I maun see her first, and hear her speak,' said the knight, 'and ken what blood and what name; and whether she be Scots or English.'

'Suppose that you *have* seen her and heard her speak,' said the dame; 'and suppose she was of Fife blood; and that her name was *lady* Mary Kirkmichael: What would you then say against her?'

'Nothing at all, madam,' said Sir Charles, bowing extremely low.

'Do you then consent to accept of such a one for your lady?'

'How can I possibly tell? Let me see her.'

'O Sir Charles! gallant and generous knight! do not force a young blushing virgin to disclose what she would gladly conceal. You *do* see her, Sir Charles! You *do* see her and hear her speak too. Nay, you see her kneeling at your feet, brave and generous knight! You see her *tears* and you hear her *weep* – and what hero can withstand that? Oh Sir Charles!—'

'Hout, hout, hout!' cried Sir Charles interrupting her, and raising her gently with both hands, 'Hout, hout, hout! for heaven's sake behave yoursel, and dinna flee away wi' the joke athegither, sweet lady. Ye may be very weel, and ye are very weel for ought that I see, but troth ye ken a man maun do ae thing afore another, and a woman too. Ye deserve muckle better than the likes o' me, but I dinna incline marriage; and mair than that, I hae nae time to spare.'

'Ah, Sir Charles, you should not be so cruel. You should think better of the fair sex, Sir Charles! Look at this face. What objections have you to it, Sir Charles?'

'The face is weel enough, but it will maybe change. The last blooming face that took me in turned out a very different article the next day. Ah, lady! Ye little ken what I hae suffered by women and witchcraft, or ye wadna bid me think weel o' them.'

'Well, knight, since I cannot melt your heart, I must tell you that there is a plot against your liberty, and you will be a married man before to

morrow's night. It is a grand plot, and I am convinced it is made solely to entrap you to marry an English heiress that is a captive here, who is fallen so deeply in love with you that, if she does not attain you for her lover and husband, her heart will break. She has made her case known to the Queen, and I have come by it: therefore, sir knight, as you value my life, keep this a *profound* secret. I thought it a pity not to keep you out of English connections; therefore I sent for you privily to offer you my own hand, and then you could get off on the score of engagement.'

'Thank you kindly, madam.'

'Well, Sir. On pretence of an appendage to the marriage of the king's favourite daughter with the greatest nobleman of the land, before the festival conclude, it is agreed on that there are to be a number of weddings beside, which are all to be richly endowed. The ladies are to choose among the heroes of the games; and this lady Jane Howard is going to make choice of you, and the law is to be framed in such a manner that there will be no evading it with honour. You have been a mortal enemy to the English; so have they to you. Had not you better then avoid the connection by a previous marriage, or an engagement say?'

'I think I'll rather take chance, with your leave, madam: Always begging your pardon, ye see. But, depend on it, I'll keep your secret, and am indebted to you for your kind intentions. I'll take chance. They winna surely force a wife on ane whether he will or no?'

'Perhaps not. One who does *not incline marriage*, and has not *time to spare* to be married, may be excused. Tell me, seriously; surely you will never think of accepting of her?'

'It is time to decide about that when aince I get the offer. I can hardly trow what ye say is true; but if the King and the Warden will hae it sae, ye ken what can a body do?'

'Ah, there it is! Cruel Sir Charles! But you know you really have not a minute's *time to spare* for marriage, and the want of *inclination* is still worse. I have told you, sir knight, and the plot will be accomplished to-morrow. I would you would break her heart, and absolutely refuse her, for I hate the rosy minx. But three earldoms and nine hundred thousand marks go far! Ah me! Goodbye, noble knight. Be secret for my sake.'

Sir Charles returned to his men in the great square, laughing in his sleeve all the way. He spoke some to himself likewise, but it was only one short

sentence, which was this: ‘Three earldoms and nine hundred thousand marks! Gudefaith, Corbie will be astonished.’

It was reported afterwards, that this grand story of Mary’s to Sir Charles was nothing at all in comparison with what she told to lady Jane, of flames and darts, heroism, royal favour, and distinction; and, finally, of endless captivity in the event of utter rejection. However that was, when the troops assembled around the fortress in the evening, and the leaders in the hall, proclamations were made in every quarter, setting forth, that all the champions who had gained prizes since the commencement of the Christmas games were to meet together, and contend at the same exercises before the King, for other prizes of higher value; and, farther, that every successful candidate should have an opportunity of acquiring his mistress’ hand in marriage, with rich dowries, honours, manors, and privileges, to be conferred by the King and Queen; who, at the same time gave forth their peremptory commands, that these gallants should meet with no denial, and this on pain of forfeiting the royal favour and protection, not only towards the dame so refusing, but likewise to her parents, guardians, and other relations.

Never was there a proclamation issued that made such a deray among the fair sex as this. All the beauty of the Lowlands of Scotland was assembled at this royal festival. The city of Roxburgh and the town of Kelso were full of visitors; choke full of them! There were ladies in every house, beside the inmates; and, generally speaking, three *at an average* for every male, whether in the city or suburbs. Yet, for all these lovely women of high rank and accomplishments, none else fled from the consequences of the mandate but one alone, who dreaded a rival being preferred – a proof how little averse the ladies of that age were to the bonds of matrimony. Such a night as that was in the city! There were running to and fro, rapping at doors, and calling of names during the whole night. It was a terrible night for the dressmakers; for there was such a run upon them, and they had so much ado, that they got nothing done at all, except the receiving of orders which there was no time to execute.

Next morning, at eight of the day, by the abbey bell, the multitude were assembled, when the names of the former heroes were all called over, but only sixteen appeared, although twenty-two stood on the list. The candidates were then all taken into an apartment by themselves, and treated

with viands and wines, with whatever else they required. There also they were instructed in the laws of the game. Every one was obliged to contend at every one of the exercises; and the conqueror in each was to retire into the apartment of the ladies, where they were all placed in a circle, lay his prize at his mistress's feet, and retire again to the sports without uttering a word.

The exercises were held on the large plain south of the Teviot, so that they were beheld by the whole multitude without any inconveniency. The flowers of the land also beheld from their apartment in the castle, although no one saw them in return, save the fortunate contenders in the field. The first trial was a foot race for a chain of gold, given by the lady Douglas, and all the sixteen being obliged to run, the sport afforded by the race was excellent; for the eager desire to be foremost acted not more powerfully to urge the candidates to exertion than the dread of being the last, so that the two hindmost were straining every nerve, and gasping as voraciously for breath as the two foremost. Sir Charles Scott took the lead, leaving the rest quite behind, so far that every one thought he would gain with all manner of ease, and they began to hail him as conqueror. But owing to his great weight he lost breath, and in spite of all he could do the poet made by him and won the prize, which he took with a proud and a joyful heart, and laid at the feet of Delany. 'Bauchling shurf!' exclaimed Sir Charles, laughing when he saw the poet passing his elbow, 'Useless bauchling shurf! an I had kend I wad hae letten ye lie, and been singit to an izle in the low o' Ravensworth.'

'Knight, I think ye hae lost,' cried one.

'I think sae, too,' said Charles. 'I liket aye better to rin ahint an Englishman than afore him a' my life.'

The next game given out was a trial in leaping, for a pair of bracelets, clasped with gold, and set with jewels, given by the Queen. These also the poet won, and laid at Delany's feet. Sir Charles won three; one for tilting on horseback, one for wrestling, and one for pitching the iron bar, and he laid all the three prizes at the feet of Lady Jane Howard. Two lords won each of them two prizes, and other two knights won each of them one; and all, unknown to one another, laid them at the feet of Lady Jane Howard.

When the sports of the day were finished, the seven conquerors, all crowned with laurel, and gorgeously arrayed, were conducted to the gallery

where the ladies still remained; and after walking round the room to the sound of triumphal music, they were desired to kneel one by one in the order in which they had entered before, and each to invoke his mistress's pity in his own terms. It fell to the poet's lot to kneel first, who stretched forth his hands toward a certain point in the room, and expressed himself as follows: 'O lovely darling of my soul! in whom my every hope is centered; at whose feet I laid my honours down. This laurel wreath I also consecrate to thee. By all the love that I have borne for thee, the pains that I have suffered, I conjure you to raise me up, and say thou wilt be mine: – else here I'll kneel till doomsday!'

A pause ensued; the King and his nobles looked on in breathless curiosity, for they knew not where he had bestowed his favours. The dames also gazed in envious silence, and in hopes that the supplicant would be refused. He soon himself began to dread what they hoped; his countenance changed; the wild lustre of his eye faded; and he began to look around to see where he could get a sword on which to fall and kill himself. He cast one other pitiful look to Delany, but she deigned no movement to his relief – still keeping her seat, though visibly in great agitation. But, at length, when hope was extinct in his bosom, there appeared one to his relief. This was no other than his old rival the gospel friar, who had been admitted in an official capacity, in order to join hands and bless unions if any such chanced to be agreed on. He was standing ruminating behind backs; but seeing the first offer about to be rejected, and aware of the force of example, whether good or bad, and how little chance he had of employment that day if the first effort misgave, he stepped briskly up to Delany, and, taking her hand, said, 'Lo, my daughter, have not I travelled for thee in pain, and yearned over thee as a mother yearneth over the son of her youth? Why wilt thou break my heart, and the heart of him that burneth for thy love?' Delany then rose, and with trembling step came toward her lover, led by the grotesque form of the good friar. The tears gushed from the poet's eyes as she lifted the laurel crown from the floor, and replacing it on his head, said, as she raised him up, 'Thou hast adventured and overcome. Hence be thou the lord of my heart and affections.'

The friar gave them no more time to palaver, but joined their hands, pronounced them a married pair, and blessed their union in the name of the Trinity. Then Sir Charles Scott kneeled, and, casting his eyes gravely

toward the floor, said only these words: ‘Will the lady whom I serve take pity on her humble slave, or shall he retire from this presence ashamed and disgraced?’

Woman, kind and affectionate woman, is ever more ready to confer an obligation on our sex than accept of one. Lady Jane arose without any hesitation, put the crown on the knight’s head, and, with a most winning grace, raised him up, and said, ‘Gallant knight, thou wert born to conquer my countrymen and me; I yield my hand and with it my heart.’ The friar lost no time in joining their hands; he judged it best and safest to take women at their first words; and short time was it till the two were pronounced husband and wife, ‘and whom God hath joined let no man dare to put asunder. Amen!’ said the friar, and bestowed on them an earnest blessing. – Isaac the curate expatiates largely on the greatness and goodness of this couple; how they extended their possessions, and were beloved on the Border. Their son, he says, was the famous Sir Robert of Eskdale, the warden of the marches, from whom the families of Thirlstane, Harden, and many other opulent houses are descended. No union could be more happy; and besides, it rendered the Lady Douglas the happiest of women, and Mary Kirkmichael the proudest.

But to return to the scene in the gallery with the knights and their mistresses. The King and his nobles who accompanied the gallants into the apartment of the ladies, knowing nothing of the choices each had made, expected great amusement from compliances and non-compliances; and at all events, after so fair a beginning, a number of weddings to be the result. Every one of the successful knights expected the same thing; for it is a curious fact, which shows the duplicity of our character in a striking light, that, when the champions were all in the apartment together in the morning, some mentioned one lady as the flower of the land and of all present, some mentioned another, and so on. But no one ever mentioned the names either of *Delany* or *Jane Howard*. Sir Charles indeed mentioned no name, but when each had named a pretended favourite with mighty encomiums, he only added, ‘I’ll no say muckle; but there’s ane that I rank aboon a’ thae.’

The master of the ceremonies looked round to call the next champion to kneel; but, behold, he was not there! He called the next again. He was gone also! Every one of the knights had vanished, each thinking *himself* slighted by the preference given to Sir Charles Scott, but none knowing that for his

sake they were all slighted alike. The noblemen were all in the utmost consternation; the King became highly offended, and said ‘What is the meaning of this? Have these knights dared to desert their colours on the very eve of action? This is not only an affront put upon *us*, but upon our fair and noble visitors, of whose honour and feelings we are more jealous than of our own.’

But the friar, who was a man of peace, and disliked all sort of offence, when he saw the King was displeased, took speech to himself, and his speech set all the gallery into a burst of laughter. He was standing in the midst of the floor, with his book in hand, ready and eager to officiate still farther as a knitter and binder; but when he saw the knights all fled, and the King offended, he uplifted both of his hands and one of his feet, standing still on the other, and cried with a loud voice, ‘Behold my occupation is ended! Woe is me for the children of my people! For the spirit of man is departed away, and he hath no strength remaining. Oh what shall I do for the honour of my brethren! For, lo, the virgins are come to the altar, and there is none to accept of the offering. The men of might are dismissed, yea they are confounded and fled away, and the daughters of the land are left to bewail the months and years of their virginity. Woe is me, for my hand findeth nothing more to do!’

The ladies laughed immoderately at the cases of the forlorn and discomfited knights; for they had witnessed the proceedings, and saw that all their devotions were paid to one object; and as no lady of Scotland had been chosen, one could not envy another – so they tittered and laughed off the affront as well as they could.

The friar got passports into England, and after much labour and pain got the poet established in his father’s possessions, and acknowledged as the lord of Ravensworth. He also regained for him his lady’s possessions on the continent, which the Nevilles retained for the space of two hundred years. That amiable couple cultivated the arts of peace, music, and song, as long as they lived. After these things, the friar was preferred to great emoluments in his old age, and he spent them all in acts of charity and benevolence.

From Roxburgh the royal party proceeded to Melrose, where they remained two days, which they spent partly in devotion and thanks-givings, and partly in viewing the magnificent scenes in the neighbourhood, particularly the great hill of Eildon, so lately reft asunder and divided into

three by the power of the elemental spirits. To this awful theme the mind of the Queen still reverted; and, on her last visit to these mountains, she passed through the recent chasms, gazing and trembling at the effects produced by that tremendous convulsion of nature; and, at length, she had spoken and dreamed so much about it, that she proposed to go and visit the castle of Aikwood, and if possible to get a sight of the great enchanter himself, before she left the Border counties, where, she said, she might never be again. Every one tried to dissuade her from the attempt, and the King got into a high passion, but still she could not be driven from her purpose. ‘As we return to the abbey,’ said she, ‘we will go by the ford of Dornick-burn at the foot of the deep dell that you told me of, where the devil first made his appearance on horse-back to the four warriors. I should not wonder that we shall see him there again under some disguise.’

‘I would not wonder that we should,’ said Sir Charles: ‘I have been told that he is sometimes seen there in the shape of a clerk; sometimes as a mariner; and sometimes in the form of the King of Scotland. Always begging your pardon, royal madam.’

‘There is no offence, Sir Charles, as long as you do not tell me that he appears in the shape of a Queen. I hope he has never yet been known to assume the shape of a woman.’

‘He has enow to appear for him in *that* form, which I ken something about to my cost; and which your royal majesty kens mair about than I could have wished. What does your majesty account the greatest peril that man is subject to in this world?’

‘Oh war, war, certainly! Nineteen out of twenty of his perils concentrate in that, or are derived from it.’

‘Ye may be thankfu’ ye ken nae mair about it than that, my lady queen! Aince ye gang near the castle of Aikwood ye’ll get a little mair experience perhaps. Now ye are determined on ganging there the morn, and I am determined on accompanying you, since you will go. But troth I would be right wae to see my queen turned into a cow, and a little deil set to drive her; or into a grey mare, and a witch or warlock set to gallop on her; or a doe, or a hare, or a she-fox, and a tichel o’ tikes set after her to tear her a’ to tareleathers. Always begging your pardon, my liege lady.’

As they were chatting on in this familiar and jocular style, they came to the identical little deep dell, at the meeting of two rivulets, or moorland

burns, where the devil and his three attendant imps had appeared to our warriors on their way to Melrose; and, as Dan Chisholm was of the party, the Queen caused him to be called up to describe the whole scene – with the personal appearance of the arch fiend – the words he spoke, and also the extraordinary course that he had with him along the marble pavement of the air. All these matters were detailed to her by the trooper with perfect seriousness and simplicity, which made such an impression on the Queen's romantic and superstitious mind, that her countenance altered in every feature, and she was every now and then gazing around as if expecting Satan's personal appearance before them once more. The party were sitting on horseback conversing together, when the sharp eye of Sir Charles, well accustomed to the discernment of all living or moving objects, whether by night or by day, perceived a miserable looking wight approaching them by the very path on which the infernal cavalcade had formerly proceeded. The Queen was talking to Dan, still pushing her inquiries, when Sir Charles touched her gently on the shoulder, and said, 'Hush, your majesty. See who is this approaching us by the very road that the deils took? It is a question who we have here. Ane is nae sure of ony shape that appears in sic a place and sic a time as this.'

Then there was such crossing and telling of beads, and calling on the names of saints, took place with the Queen and her ladies, every one of them asking the same question in terrified whispers, 'Is it he, think you? Is it he? Oh, is it he?' Then there was a general request made that they should take instant flight, and ride home to the abbey full speed; but an opposition arose to this proposal from a quarter not expected. This was from no other than Sir Charles' English lady, whose education had taught her to despise the superstitions so prevalent in Scotland; and seeing them all about to fly from a poor wo-begone, half-famished wretch, she opposed it with indignation, adding, that she would abide his coming by herself if none else would. Sir Charles was still far from being clear about these matters, hard experience having taught him caution; however, he commended his lady's spirit, and drew up by her side: The rest marshalling behind them, they awaited in a body the coming of this doubtful guest; and every eye being fixed on his motions, so every tongue was busied in giving vent to the spontaneous movements of the mind. 'It is a palmer,' said one. 'It is a warlock,' said another. 'It is the devil,' said a third; 'I ken him by his lang

nose!' 'Aha, my royal and noble dames!' cried Sir Charles exultingly: 'If it be nae the deil, it's his man; sae we may expect some important message, either frae his infernal majesty or the great enchanter, for this is no other than his seneschal. My royal liege, this man that you see approaching is no other than Gilbert Jordan, the late laird of the Peatstacknowe, who was drawn by lot to supply the room of the wretch whom our gospel friar sent up through the clouds in a convoy of fire and brimstone. Whether this be Gibbie or his ghaist, it is hard to say; but I ken weel by the coulter nose it is either the one or the other. Your majesty will scrimply believe it, but the last time I saw that carl the deil was hauding him by the cuff o' the neck ower the topmost tower of the castle of Aikwood, and the poor laird was sprawling like a paddock in a gled's claws, when fifty fathom frae the ground. There is nought in nature I expected less to see than that creature again in the land of the living; yet it is actually he himself in flesh and blood, and that is all, for he is worn to skin and bone, and his nose is even longer than it was! Hech, laird, is this you? And are you indeed returned to the Christian world aince mair?'

'Aye troth, Yardbire, it is a' that's to the fore of me. But who have you got all here? Good-e'en to you, gentles. This brings me in mind of a story, man, that I hae heard about the hunting of Stanebires' cat—'

'Whisht, Gibbie, and gie us nane o' your auld stories about cats even now. This is the Queen of Scots and her attendants. Rather tell us, in one word, how you have made your escape from yon infernal gang in the castle of Aikwood?'

'Aha, Yardbire, that is a tale that winna tell in ae word, nor twa neither, it wad take a winter night in telling, and it is the awesomest ane that ever passed frae the lips o' man; but I am ower sair forespent at this time to begin to it.'

'Oh, no!' cried the Queen: 'Honest man, do not begin it at present. It shall serve for our evening's amusement, and you shall tell it before your King and his nobles, after you have had such refreshment as you stand in need of.' She then caused one of her squires to alight, and mounting the wearied and exhausted laird on his horse, they rode off to Melrose, where, after a plentiful meal, the laird was brought into the apartment where the King, the Queen, the abbot, with the nobles and ladies of the court, were all

assembled; and then, at the royal request, he related to them the following narrative.

CHAPTER 32

Commissions and black bills he had,
And a' the land went hey-gae mad,
The like was never seen, joe:

To dance and caper in the air,
And there's an end of him, joe.

Old Jacobite Song

Weel, ye see, my masters and mistresses, this is what I never expected to see. There is something sae grand in being in the presence of a King and Queen and their courtiers, that it brings me in mind of the devil and his agents that I have been in the habit of entertaining for a month bygane. But there is some wee difference in masters for a' that; for, in my late service, if I had been brought in to entertain them, in an instant they would have had me transformed into some paltry animal, and then amused themselves by tormenting that animal to death, by dissecting it while living. But the queerest thing of all was this – there was aye a spark of life that they could not destroy, which, for all their cruelties, remained active and intelligent as before; and the moment they put that spark of life out of one animal, they popped it into another, and there was I obliged to undergo the same dismemberment and pain once more, and so on for ever. The inflicting of torment was their chief delight, and of that delight there was no satiety – it seemed still to increase by gratification.

On the very first day that I entered on my probation they had a feast, as my comrades know, and as I also have good reason to know, for on that day I suffered death nine times; and yet I was Gibbie Jordan again before night. They first turned me into a cock, and after the three pages had chased me round the castle, and thrown stones at me till I was hanging out my tongue, and could not cackle another lilt, they seized me, took me into the scullery, and drew my neck. Ere ever I was aware, they had me transformed into a

huge lubberly calf, while one of the hellish pages was dragging me by the neck with a prickly rope made of hurcheon hides, and the two others were belabouring my rumple with cudgels. I suspected their intentions, and being still terrified for death, and inclining rather to suffer any thing, I drew back, shook my head, and bellowed at them, while they still redoubled their blows on my carcase, and cursed me. In spite of all I could do, they dragged me gasping into the slaughter-house, kept the knife an excruciating long time at my throat, and then, after piercing the jugular vein, they laughed immoderately to see me running about, bleeding to death, with my glazed stupid eyes; and when, through faintness, I began to flounder and grovel on the floor, they laughed amain, threshed me to make me plunge a little more, and when I could do nothing farther than give a faint baa! they thought that the best sport of all, and mimicked me.

I had scarcely ceased baaing as a calf, when I found myself a beautiful cappercailzie, winging the winter cloud, and three devils of falcons after me. 'Now,' thinks I to myself, 'If I do not give you the glaiks now, my hellish masters, may I never wap a wing again. By all the powers of swiftness, but I shall try for once if the feathers shall not carry the flesh away.' Sanct Martha, as I did scour the rimy firmament! I took the wind in my tail, but I went with such amazing velocity that I left it behind me, and as I clove it, it seemed to return in my face. I reached the shoulder of a lofty mountain, and then I laid back my wings, and bolted through the air like a flash of lightning. 'O ho! Messrs Hawks, where are you now?' thought I to myself. Good Lord! ere ever I was aware, there was ane o' them gave me a nab on the crown, that dovered me, and gart me tumble heels-o'er-head down frae the shelves of the clouds; and lighting with a dunt on the ground, I had nae shift but to stap my head in a heather bush, and let them pelt at me till I got some breath again. Then I made for a cottage, thinking the inmates could not but pity my condition, and drive the hawks away from me. I took cover among their cabbage, in the sight of both man and wife; but instead of pitying me, the one came with an old spear, and the other with the tongs, to finish my existence – and always when the falcons came down on me with their talons, the two cried out, 'Weel done, little hawkie! Yether him up! puik him weel!' I was forced to take wing again, till at length, through fatigue and want of feathers I dropt close to the castle whence I had set out, and the three falcons, closing with me, first picked out my eyes and then my

brains. I was stabbed as a salmon, hunted as a roe-buck, felled as a bull, and had my head chopped off for a drake. The dinner was made up of me. I supplied every dish, and then was forced to cook them all afterward. It was no wonder that I could not partake of the fragments of the meal.

From the moment that the Christian warriors were all dismissed with disgrace from the castle, the devil became contumacious with the Master, and assayed to carry matters with a very high hand. But he had to do with one that would not succumb, no not in the smallest point, but who opposed him with a degree of virulence of which even the master fiend seemed scarcely capable. It was a scene of constant contention and rage, and the little subordinate demons did not always know which to obey. It was, if it please your Majesties, a scene acted in terrible magnificence, of which I have seen several poor and abortive emblems among mortal men. And henceforth I shall aways believe and feel, when I see a family or society constantly involved in disputes, wranglings, and angry emotions, that they are children of the wicked one, and moved by the spirit of discord, that bane of the human race.

'The worthy gentleman hath said well,' said the abbot. 'It is a moral truth that can never be too deeply impressed, that *peace and love only lead to happiness*. They are emanations from above, and the contrary passions from beneath. All the fierce and fiery passions of the soul are the offspring of hell fire. But a truce with preaching. Honest friend, go on with your strange relation, and acquaint us in what manner his infernal majesty and the king of mortal magicians spent their time.'

In constant discord and jarring. The devil challenged the Master with impotency in entertaining a poor crazy monk, and submitting to be protected and even cowed by him; at which the Master took high offence, and retorted in the bitterest terms; while the other always hinted that he would make him repent his intercourse with that preposterous and presumptive fool. So he termed our own worthy friar and head chaplain.

In one thing only they agreed, and that was in abusing the witches. Never were there poor deluded creatures guided in such a way as they. The devil says to the Master one day in my hearing, 'Brother Michael,' says he, 'I have an act of justice to perform to all our true and trusty female lieges in this quarter. I gave them my princely word of honour, that on their yielding themselves up souls and bodies to me and to my service, they should all be

married!, and all to young and goodly husbands too. That having been the principal, and almost the only boon, the good consistent creatures required of me for the sacrifice they made, they must not be disappointed.' The Master acquiesced, but at the same time remarked, with what I judged unreasonable chagrin, that when he was keeping his word so punctually, it betokened nothing good for those to whom he kept it.

Well, we had a witch's wedding every night for nine nights running; but such extreme of wickedness is past all human comprehension, beyond the possibility of description. The marriage ceremony itself, always performed by a demon in the habit of a friar, was a piece of the most horrid blasphemy ever conceived; and every night one of the witches was married to the devil in disguise. Sometimes the bridegroom made his appearance as a gay cavalier, sometimes as a country squire, a foreign merchant, a minstrel, and a moss-trooper. The old wretch of a bride was all painted by some devilish cantrip, and bedecked with false jewels, and though she seemed always aware of the deceit in a certain degree, from former experiences, yet it was wonderful with what avidity each of the old creatures clung to her enamoured and goodly husband! How they mumped and minced in their talking, and ogled with their old grey ropy eyes! And then how they danced! Gracious me, how they flung, and danced among the deils and the warlocks! and capered and snapped their fingers, giving their partners often a jerk on the nose or the temple as they passed and repassed in the reel, as quick as green clocks on a pool. Then the bedding of the brides, these surpassed all description; and as they had me fairly in thrall, I was suffered to witness every thing. The first witch bride was led out at the back door of the castle with much state and ceremony, into a place that had been a bowling green, and in which there was nothing else save a bowling green: Yet, to my amazement, there stood a bower of the most superb magnificence; and there, in a chamber hung with gorgeous tapestry that glittered all with gold and rubies, the loving couple retired to their repose, and to all the delights and joys of so happy an union. Then wishing them the greatest conjugal felicity, all the gallants returned to the castle. But I, being curious to see what would be the end of this grand pavilion in the bowling-green, which I knew must be merely a delusion, a vision, a shadow of something that had no stability of existence, went up to the top of the castle, and from a loop-hole sat and watched what was to be the end of this

phenomenon. I waited a good long while, and began to think all was real, and that the splendid witch had met with a happy fortune – for I knew them too well to be all witches from former happy experience. But at length the lusty bridegroom, as I supposed, began to weary of his mate, for I saw the form of the bower beginning to change, and fall flat on the top, and its hue also became of a lurid fiery colour. I cannot tell your Majesties what sort of sensations I felt when I saw the wedded couple sinking gradually down through a bed of red burning fire, and the poor old beldame writhing to death in the arms of a huge and terrible monster, that squeezed her in its embraces, and hugged her, and caressed her till the spark of wretched life was wholly extinguished. I saw distinctly by the light of the flame that surrounded them, and marked every twist of the features, and every quiver of the convulsed limbs; yet these were not more impressive than the joy of the exulting fiend, who continued to caress and kiss his agonized mate to the last, and called her his love, and his darling, and his heart's delight. At length the distortions of the human countenance reached their acme – the shrivelled bosom forgot to throb, and, with the expiry of the mortal spark, the lurid flame that burnt around them also went out, and all was darkness, There was no bower, no chamber, no bridal bed, but a cold winter soil; and I thought that, through the gloom, I perceived the couple still lying on it.

As I could get no rest all that night for thinking of the terrible scene I had witnessed, as soon as the sun rose next morning I went out to the bowling-green, but found nothing there save the strangled body of the wretched woman – a dismal and humbling sight – squeezed almost to a jelly, and every bone broken as if it had been smashed on an anvil. Being curious to examine her robes in which she appeared with such splendour the evening before, and her jewels, part of which I had seen her lay carefully aside, I took every thing up as it lay. Her robes were a small heap of the most wretched rags imaginable: her pearl necklace was a string of dead beetles, and her diamond rings pieces of thread, on which were fastened small knots of clay, and every thing else proportionally mean. While I was standing considering this vile degradation that had taken place, I heard a voice at a little distance that called to me and said, 'Gibbie Jordan! Gibbie Jordan! why standest thou in amazement at a true emblem of all worldly grandeur! It is all equally unreal and unsubstantial as that on which thou lookest, and to that it must all come at last.'

‘Hout, friend,’ thought I, ‘it canna surely be a’ sae perfectly unreal as this, else what does it signify?’ But a’ that I could look and glime about, I could never discover the speaker that said this; and when I thought seriously of the matter, I found that it comes a’ to the same thing in the end.

‘Honest friend, thou hast again illustrated a momentous moral truth,’ said the abbot – ‘and I thank thee for it. Thou hast the art, in thy simplicity, of extracting more good out of real evil than any expounder of divine truths throughout the land. Thou art both a moral and a natural philosopher, and I intend conferring on thee some benefice under the church, that thy talents may no longer remain locked up in a helmet. Prithee, go on with thy extraordinary narrative; but these witch weddings are too horrible for mortal ears.’

Then you may consider, my Lord Abbot, what they were for mortal eyes, especially such a run of them, which were every night varied in their horrors, and terminated in something perfectly distinct from all those preceding. On the second night the bridegroom was a foreign merchant, a man of bustle and punctuality, who said he could not remain late with his kind convivial friends, and was under the necessity of carrying his bride off at an early hour, having business of importance to transact on the morrow. It was a speculation, he said, on which he calculated making a good profit, and a man who was coming in to have a wife, and in all probability a small family to maintain, required to look after and attend to these matters. The witch caressed him in ecstacy when he made this speech, and proffered to go with him as soon as he chose. She saluted her cronies, and bade them farewell; and although there is no love among those sort of people, yet there was still so much of human nature remaining, that there seemed to subsist a degree of regret that they should never meet again. My own heart was even sore for the wretched beldame; for I had witnessed a scene the preceding night which had been withheld from her view, and those of the other brides that were to be; and I knew that a fate somewhat similar awaited them all. They mounted this one behind the spruce merchant on a tall gallant charger whose eyes gleamed like lightning, and away they set over the leas of Carterhaugh, at a light gallop; but at every bound the swiftness of the steed increased, till it was quickly beyond the speed of the eagle. The witch held like grim death, and would fain have expostulated with the bridegroom on the madness of risking their necks for a little per centage – but her velocity

was such that she could make no farther speech of it, than just a squeak now and then like a short hare. The reckless merchant flew on, still increasing his rapidity, until he came to the very highest rock of the Harehead linn. The witch knew of the dreadful chasm that was before them, and weening that her husband did not know she uttered a piercing shriek; but the void was only thirty yards across and a hundred deep, so the fearless merchant, meaning to take it at one leap, made his charger bound from the top of the precipice. The infernal courser cleared the linn, but the witch's head failing, she toppled off about the middle space. There were two fishermen spearing salmon in the bottom of the gulf, who saw the phenomenon pass over their heads, and the wife lose her hold and fall off; they heard her likewise saying, as she came adown the air, 'Aih, what a fa' I will get!' And as she said, so it fell out; for she alighted on the rocks a short space from the place where they stood, and was literally dashed in pieces; but the steed ran away with the merchant over hill and dale like a thunderbolt, and neither the one nor the other ever looked over his shoulder to see what had befallen the bride.

This continuation of horrors still depriving me of rest, I went into the linn the next morning to look after the corpse; but the three pages, Prig, Prim, and Pricker, were engaged with it, cutting it trimly up, and hanging it on the trees of the linn to be frozen, so that they might thereby be enabled to preserve it for some grand experiment. In the same manner did they serve the remains of all the brides; none of them ever being buried – but there was one taken away bodily. I shall now, in conformity with your reverence's hint, desist from the description of any more of these weddings, and proceed to the adventure by which I attained my liberty.

I had often attempted this, both by night and by day, but these imps seemed to possess a sort of prescience, for in all my attempts I was seized and maltreated so grossly that I gave up all hopes of escape, otherwise than by some upbreaking of the warlock's establishment, and of all such incidents I had resolved to avail myself, and you all see that at last I have succeeded – which happened on this wise.

Still as Christmas tide drew on, the wranglings between my two chief masters, the devil and the warlock, grew more and more fierce; and as I heard they were obliged to sever before that time, I both hoped and dreaded some terrible convulsion. The fiend, for several successive days, was

always hinting to the Master that it now behoved the latter to deliver him up the black book and the divining rod; and he tried to cajole him out of them by fair speeches and boundless promises: but with these requests the Master testified no disposition to comply, and the promises he utterly disregarded, bidding him bestow his promises on those who did not know him. At length the fiend fairly told him, that he must and would have the possession of these invaluable treasures, which ought never to have been put into the hands of mortal man, and that now he would have them if he should tear his heart from his bosom to attain the boon.

I weened that matters were come to that pass now that the Master would be obliged to yield, and that all this show of resistance was only the ebullition of a proud and indignant spirit struggling against the yoke under which it knew it was obliged to bow, like a horse that champs the bit, to the sway of which it knows too well it must submit. In all this, however, I had reckoned before mine host, and knew not the resources of the great magician. Beneath the influence of the cross I found him a child, a novice, a nonentity, unresolved and inconsistent in his actions. But amongst the beings with whom he associated I found him a superior intelligence, a spirit formed to controul the mightiest energies, and not brooking submission to any power unless by compulsion. To my utter astonishment he not only gave the archfiend absolute refusal, but haughty defiance; and then it was apparent, that, except from necessity, all forbearance was at an end.

‘Preposterous madman! dost thou know whom thou beardest?’ said the fiend, gnashing his teeth with rage and thirst of vengeance: ‘Knowest thou with whom thou art contending, thou maniac? – and that I can wring thy soul out of thy body, consigning the one to the dunghill, and the other to elemental slavery, at my will and pleasure?’

‘I defy thee,’ said the Master: ‘Do thy worst. He that imparts a moiety of his power to another, must abide by the consequences. Do I not know with whom I am contending? Yes! I know thee! And thou art so well aware that I do, that at this moment thou tremblest beneath my rod. I know thee for a liar, a deceiver, a backbiter, and a spirit of insatiable malevolence. Who can lay one of these charges to my name? Were I immortal as thou art, how I would hurl thee from thy usurped and tyrannic sway over the mighty energies of nature. Were I freed of the incumbrances of mortality – of blood that may be let out by a bodkin – bones that may be broken by the tip of an

oxgoad – and breath that may be stopped by the twang of a bow-string; of vitals, subjected to be torn by disease – preyed on by hunger, thirst, and a thousand casualties beside: – yes, were I rid of these congregated impediments, as I shall soon be, I would thrust thee down into that subordinate sphere of action to which only thy perverse nature is fitted. This black book and this divining-rod are mine. They were consigned to my hands by thyself and the four viceroys of the elements, and part with them shall I never, either in life or in death; and while I possess them I am thy superior. Begone, and let me hear no more of thy brawling at this time, lest I humble thee, and trample on thee before thy day of power be expired.'

This the Master pronounced in loud and furious accents; and as he finished he struck the devil across the gorge with his golden rod. The blow made him spring aloof, and tumble into the air, it had such powerful effect on his frame; and when he stood again on his feet, he roared with rage and indignation, in a voice that resembled thunder. The Master had the black book belted to his bosom, with bands of steel, that were hammered in the forge of hell; and laying his left hand upon that, and brandishing his divining-rod in his right, he dared the fiend to the combat. The latter approached, and poured from his mouth and nostrils such a stream of liquid flame on the magician, that it appeared like a fiery rainbow between them. This greatly incommoded the Master, and made him skip like a mountebank; but it was soon exhausted, and then the fiend threw trees and rocks at him, some of the latter of the weight of five tons. All these the Master eschewed; and though he sought no other weapons but his rod, he brake in upon his antagonist, and chaced him from the field. Then the war of words again commenced, which increased to a tempest of threatening, wrath, and defiance. The arch-demon boasted of his legions, and of their irresistible power; and threatened to bring them all to the contest, and annihilate the Master and his adherents, root and branch.

'I have already said that I fear neither them nor thee,' said the Master. 'What though thou hast the sovereignty over the element of fire, and all the fierce and indurated spirits that sojourn and ply in the sultry regions of flame, as also of the grovelling spirits of the mould? Have not I at my command those of the air and the water? I can muster against thee the storm, the whirlwind, and the raging tempest, the overwhelming wave, and the descending torrent. These shall extinguish thy meteor hosts, and sweep

thy moldwarps from the face of the earth. I am in the midst of my elements here. Thou art out of thine, and that thou shalt feel when thou bringest it to trial.'

Thus parted these two once-bound associates, but now jealous and inexorable foes – a good lesson to all those who form combinations inimical to the laws or authority of the land in which they reside. Like those master-spirits, such are likewise conspirators against rightful sovereignty, although on a smaller scale; and like those whom they imitate, and by whom they are moved, their counsels will always be turned either to foolishness or against themselves.

'The sphere that this man hath filled in society,' said the abbot, 'is far below that in which he ought to have moved. If his narrative is true, which I can hardly believe, he turns it to most excellent uses; and if it is an apologue, it is one well conceived for the purposes of instruction. Verily, this gentleman hath never moved in his proper sphere.'

'I think it is not very unlikely that your reverence says,' said Sir Ringan, 'for he made no great figure in it. Tho' I had always a partiality for him, I had no great faith in his valour. He would rather have cut down a warrior behind his back than before his face any time. He has made mare quake this night wi' his tale than ever he did wi' his weapon. I entreat ye to get on, laird, and let us hear how they made up matters.'

Made up matters, does my chief say? That was a term no more mentioned between them. They separated but to raise their different forces, and meet again with more fury and effect. The Master spoke to his three pages, and asked if they were resolved to stand firm to his interest? They answered, that they would, till the term of their bondage expired.

'Then am I doubly armed!' said the Master, exultingly; 'and I will show your tyrant that I can quell his utmost rage. Speed thee, my trusty and nimble spirits; speed to the western and northern spheres, and rouse the slumbering angels of the winds and the waters. Tell them to muster their

array, and bear hitherward – to rear the broad billows of the Atlantic up against the breast of heaven, and to make a bellows of every cloud to gather the winds up behind them. Then bring down the irresistible spirits of the frozen north in ambush – and who shall stand against their fury! How soon will you execute your commissions?'

'Master, I'll ring the surface of the ocean, from the line to the first field of pickled ice, before the hour-glass is half run.'

'Master, I'll look south on the polar star – call every whale, sea-monster, and ice-shagged spirit by his name, and return to you before the cock-bittern can boomb his vesper.'

'And I'll to the moon,
And the stars aboon,
And rack my invention
For the coming contention:
And the wind and the weet,
And the snow and the sleet,
I'll gather and gather,
And drive them on hither.'

With that the three imps departed on their several missions, but not before they had seized me, and bound me to a ring on a turret of the castle. The Master retired into his apartment for some time, but soon came up to the level space on the top of the castle, our old birth, and strode about in the most violent agitation, but appearing rather to be moved by anger and impatience than by dread. At length, he came up to me, and said, 'How now, droich? What thinkest thou of all this?'

I said nothing, for I durst not answer a word.

'Dost thou think,' continued he, 'that there exists another being, either mortal or immortal, like me, thy master?'

I still durst not answer a word; for if I had said *no*, it would have been blasphemy; and if I had said *yes*, it would have provoked him to do me a mischief; so I looked at my bonds, and held my peace.

'Thou darest not say there is,' continued he; 'but I know what thou thinkest. Sit thou there in peace till this great trial of power be over; and if thou darest for thy life invoke another name than mine, thou shalt never stir

from that spot dead or alive. But if thou takest heed to this injunction, and cease from all petitions to, or mention of, a name which thou mayest judge superior to mine, then shalt thou be set at liberty to join thy friends.'

I determined to attend to this – but he waited not for my answer, but strode away, looking now and then on the book of destiny, and at the western heaven alternately. At length he exclaimed, 'Yonder they come! Yonder they rise in grand battalia! Noble and potent spirits! How speedily have you executed your commission. Yonder comes the muster of my array, and who shall stand against them!'

I looked towards the west when I heard him talking in such ecstacies, but could see nothing save a phalanx of towering clouds, rolling up in wreaths from the dun horizon. I had seen the same scene a hundred times, and could hardly help smiling at his enthusiasm, especially when he went over a long muster-roll of the names of spirits and monsters whom he saw approaching in the cloud. 'It is a sign that warlocks have clear een,' thinks I, quietly, 'for I see nothing but a range of rolling and restless clouds.' However, he was so overjoyed with the sight of this visionary array, that, having no other to communicate with, he came rapidly up to me, and said, 'Tell me, droich, didst thou ever witness any thing so truly grand as the approach of this host of mine?'

'You must first lend me the use of your eyes that I may see them,' said I; 'for, on my word, I see nothing save two or three files of castled clouds, which I have seen an hundred times.'

With that he lent me a blow with his rod, and said, though not apparently in wrath, 'Thou hast no brighter eyes, and no brighter conceptions, than a hedgehog, but art a mere clod of the valley, a worm; if I knew of aught lower to liken thee to, I would do it! Dost thou see nothing like fleets and armies approaching yonder? Dost thou not see an hundred and seven of the ships of the ocean above, coming full sail, with colours flying, and canvas spread? Seest thou not also, to the south of these, two files of behemoths, with ten thousand warriorspirits beside?'

I looked again, and though I was sensible it must be a delusion brought on by the stroke of his powerful rod, yet I did see the appearance of a glorious fleet of ships coming bounding along the surface of the firmament of air, while every mainsail was bosomed out like the side of a Highland mountain. I saw, besides, whole columns of what I supposed to be

crocodiles, sharks, kelpies, and water-horses, with a thousand monsters never dreamed of by human being. The Master marked my astonishment, and exulted still the more; and then he desired me to turn round, and look toward the north. At first I could see nothing; but on being touched again with the divining-rod, I shall never forget such a sight as opened gradually to my view. The whole northern hemisphere, from the eastern to the western horizon, was covered with marshalled hosts of the shades of gigantic warriors. They were all mailed in white armour, as if it had been sprinkled with hoar-frost; and their beards, which had the appearance of icicles, hung down, swinging in the wind, like so many inverted forests, stripped of their foliage and bark, and encrusted with ice. They were all mounted on the ghosts of crackens, whales, and walruses: and for bows and quivers each had a blown bladder on his back as large as the hill of Ben-Nevis. My heart quaked at the view of these tremendous polar spirits, and I said, 'Great and magnificent Master, are yon terrible chaps all coming hither?'

'Certes they are,' said he: 'Why dost thou ask after having heard my mandate sent forth?'

'Because,' said I, 'If you bearded spirits be a' coming here, I wish I were somewhere alse, for the like of yon was never beheld by man. If your opponents dare face you, they have a spirit beyond what I can conceive.'

'They will be here, and that instantly,' said he, 'And lo! yonder they come! I will go down and meet them on the open field. But, in the meantime, I will loose you with my own hands, for who knows what may be the issue of this day; remain where thou art, for here thou shalt be safe, but no where else.'

I looked; and as far as my eyes could discern, I saw as it were a thousand thousand sparks of fire rising from the east, that came in a straight line toward me, and with great velocity. As they came nearer I perceived that they were all fiery serpents, with faces like men, and small flaming spears issuing from their mouths, which they held between their teeth, or drew in as they listed. These were led on to the combat by the arch-fiend himself, who came at their head in the form of a huge fiery dragon with his iron crown on his head, and wings springing from his shoulders behind, that reached as high as the hill of Blackandro. 'Aih! God guide us!' thinks I to mysel, 'Michael has an awsome adversary to contend with the day!' He was nothing daunted, however, but went boldly down the valley, where he was

met by hosts of crawling monsters, such as snakes, lizards, and a thousand others. These I took to be the spirits of the element of earth – but they were lubbards in a field of battle, for, at a brandish of the Master's magical rod, they ran off wagging their tails in such a vengeance of a hurry that they overturned one another.

The van of Michael's western array had by this time gained the middle sky, and hung boiling and wheeling like a troubled ocean straight above his head and above mine. Its colour was as dark as pitch, but there was now and then a shade of a dead white colour rolled out, and as suddenly again swallowed up in the darkness. I never saw ought so awfully sublime. It had now descended so low, that it hid the polar giants entirely from my view, and the Master kept waving his rod towards it, and clapping his left hand always on the black book, till at length, with the motion of a whirlpool, the cloud came and settled all round him. The fiend and his firebrands perceiving this, darted with the utmost fury into the middle of it, and the most tremendous crash of thunder ensued that ever shook heaven and earth. My eyes were dazzled so that I could not see ought distinctly, but I perceived these flaming meteors glancing and quivering round the verges of the darkness, and ever and anon darting again into it. Seven of these peals of thunder succeeded one another, and then I saw the spirits of flame would overcome, for the darkness began to scatter, and I saw the Master hard bested, defending himself with his rod against a multitude. He then cried with a loud voice, and waved his rod toward the north, and that moment the giant warriors of the polar regions loosed all their quivers at once, and with such effect, that they tossed the opposing legions before them like chaff. The hailstones, the snow, and the sleet, poured upon them thicker and faster, and the wind roared louder than their thunders had done before. There was no more power in their foes to stand before them; they were scattered, driven away, and extinguished. When the Master saw this, he shouted aloud for joy, calling out 'Victory!' and leaping from the ground in ecstacy. But when he was in the very paroxysm of exultation, the great dragon came round with a circular motion behind the castle, and approaching behind the wizard's back before he was aware, seized him by the hair with one paw, and by the iron belt with the other, and bore him off into the air straight upward. The Master struggled and writhed very hard, but never opened his lips. At length, after great exertion, he struck the monster a blow with his

rod that made him quit his hold, and fly away yelling after his discomfited legions.

The Master fell to the ground from a great height, and lay still, and when I saw no one to come near him, I left the corner where I had hid myself, and ran to his assistance; but he was quite dead. His teeth had severed his tongue in two, and were clenched close together; his eyes were open, and every bone of his body was broken. Having witnessed the unspeakable value of the golden rod, I put out my hand and took hold of it, wanting to bring it away with me, but I might as well have tried to have heaved the castle from its foundations. Besides, when I tugged at it, the dead man turned his eyes toward me with a fierceness that chilled me to the heart, so I fled and came hitherward with all my might. He is lying in a little hidden valley, at the side of the burn, immediately above the castle, with the book of fate locked in his bosom, his rod in his hand, and his eyes open. I have now described to your Majesties this scene exactly as I saw it; but I must also tell you, that when I came to the mill, both the miller and his man, neither of whom knew me, said it had been an awful storm of thunder and lightning. I asked if they perceived nothing about it but a common storm of thunder and lightning? And they said, nothing, save that it was exceedingly violent, and rather uncommon at such a season of the year. I have, therefore, some suspicions that there might be magical delusion operating on my sight; but of this I am certain, that the great enchanter was carried up into the middle space between heaven and earth, fell down, and was killed.

‘I think there can be no doubt,’ said the King, ‘that what you have told us is the plain and unvarnished truth, though, perhaps, the rod of divination might open your eyes to see the storm in a different light from that seen by the eyes of common men. Of this there can be no doubt, that the greatest man, and the most profound scholar of the age, has perished in this conflict of the elements. He has not only kept the world in awe, but in dreadful agitation for the space of thirty years; let us, therefore, all go to-morrow and see him honourably interred. I ask no rites of sepulture to be performed over his remains, which, if living, he would have deprecated, only let us all

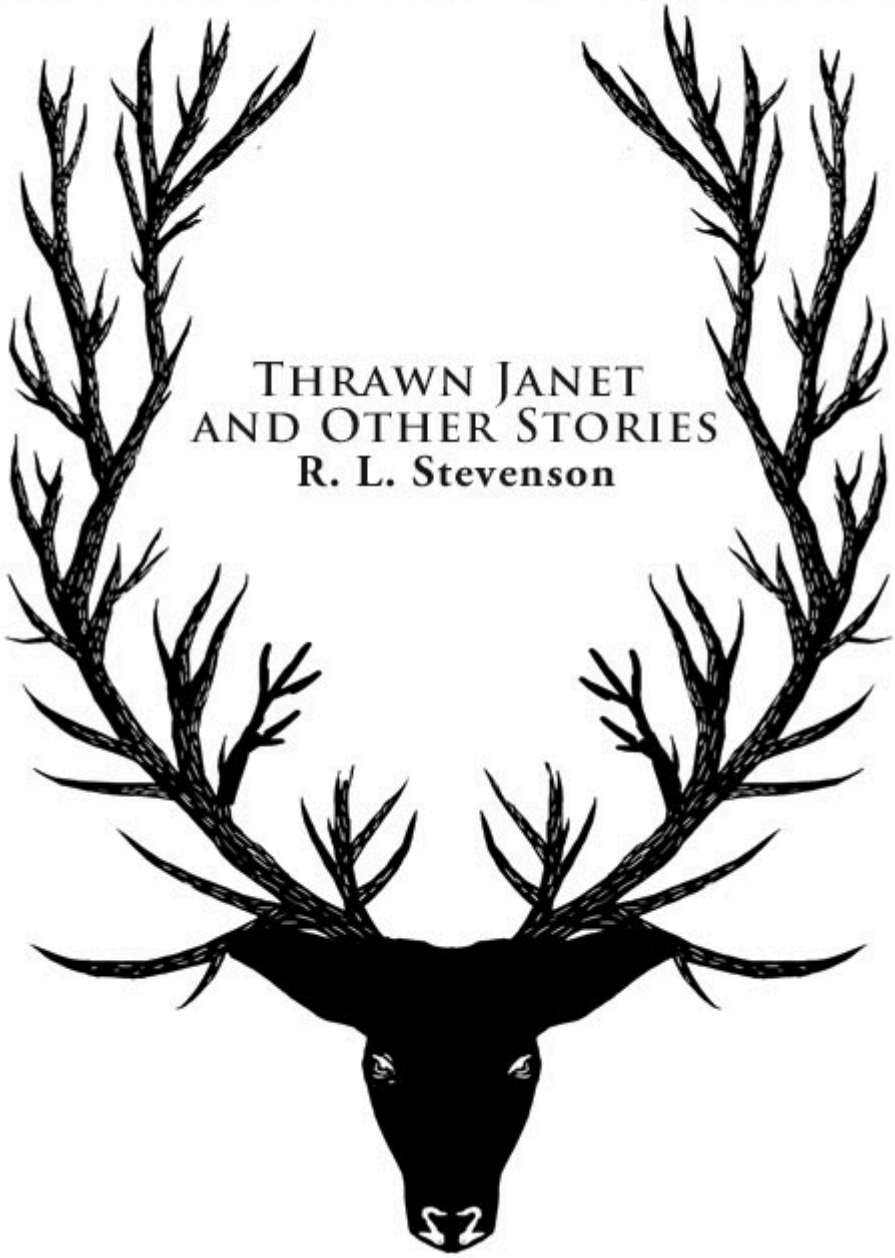
go and see his body reverendly deposited in the tomb, lest it be left to consume in the open fields.'

They went, and found him lying as stated, only that his eyes were shut, some of his attendant elves having closed them over night. His book was in his bosom, and his rod in his hand, from either of which no force of man could sever them, although when they lifted the body and these together, there was no difference in weight from the body of another man. The King then caused these dangerous relics to be deposited along with the body in an iron chest, which they buried in a vaulted aisle of the abbey of Melrose; and the castle of Aikwood has never more been inhabited by mortal man.

Footnote

fn1 As there can be no doubt of the authenticity of this part of the Curate's tale, these secret passages must have been carried under ground all the way from the castle to the junction of the two rivers; and it is said that a tradition still exists on the spot, that these vaulted paths have often been discovered by former inhabitants.

SCOTTISH
SUPERNATURAL CLASSICS



THRAWN JANET AND OTHER STORIES

R. L. Stevenson

‘It seemed she was guan to speak, but wanted words, an’ made a sign wi’ the left hand. There cam’ a clap o’ wund, like a cat’s fluff; oot gaed the can’le, the saughs skrieghed like folk; an’ Mr Soulis kenned that, live or die, this was the end o’t.’

About the Author

Robert Louis Stevenson(1850–1894) was born in Edinburgh, the son of a lighthouse designer. Deciding not to follow in his family's footsteps, he studied law at Edinburgh University, but after leaving, became a writer. He best known for the novels *Treasure Island, Kidnapped* and *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Stevenson died in Samoa in 1894 at the age of 44.

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The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Story of the Door

Mr Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary and yet somehow lovable. At friendly meetings, and when the wine was to his taste, something eminently human beaconed from his eye; something indeed which never found its way into his talk, but which spoke not only in these silent symbols of the after-dinner face, but more often and loudly in the acts of his life. He was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years. But he had an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove. 'I incline to Cain's heresy,' he used to say quaintly: 'I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.' In this character, it was frequently his fortune to be the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of downgoing men. And to such as these, so long as they came about his chambers, he never marked a shade of change in his demeanour.

No doubt the feat was easy to Mr Utterson; for he was undemonstrative at the best, and even his friendship seemed to be founded in a similar catholicity of good-nature. It is the mark of a modest man to accept his friendly circle ready-made from the hands of opportunity; and that was the lawyer's way. His friends were those of his own blood or those whom he had known the longest; his affections, like ivy, were the growth of time, they implied no aptness in the object. Hence, no doubt, the bond that united him to Mr Richard Enfield, his distant kinsman, the well-known man about town. It was a nut to crack for many, what these two could see in each other, or what subject they could find in common. It was reported by those who encountered them in their Sunday walks, that they said nothing, looked

singularly dull, and would hail with obvious relief the appearance of a friend. For all that, the two men put the greatest store by these excursions, counted them the chief jewel of each week, and not only set aside occasions of pleasure, but even resisted the calls of business, that they might enjoy them uninterrupted.

It chanced on one of these rambles that their way led them down a by-street in a busy quarter of London. The street was small and what is called quiet, but it drove a thriving trade on the weekdays. The inhabitants were all doing well, it seemed, and all emulously hoping to do better still, and laying out the surplus of their grains in coquetry; so that the shop fronts stood along that thoroughfare with an air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen. Even on Sunday, when it veiled its more florid charms and lay comparatively empty of passage, the street shone out in contrast to its dingy neighbourhood, like a fire in a forest; and with its freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note, instantly caught and pleased the eye of the passenger.

Two doors from one corner, on the left hand going east, the line was broken by the entry of a court; and just at that point, a certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street. It was two storeys high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower storey and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence. The door, which was equipped with neither bell nor knocker, was blistered and distained. Tramps slouched into the recess and struck matches on the panels; children kept shop upon the steps; the schoolboy had tried his knife on the mouldings; and for close on a generation, no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages.

Mr Enfield and the lawyer were on the other side of the by-street; but when they came abreast of the entry, the former lifted up his cane and pointed.

‘Did you ever remark that door?’ he asked; and when his companion had replied in the affirmative, ‘It is connected. In my mind,’ added he, ‘with a very odd story.’

‘Indeed?’ said Mr Utterson, with a slight change of voice, ‘and what was that?’

‘Well, it was this way,’ returned Mr Enfield: ‘I was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o’clock of a black winter morning, and my way lay through a part of town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps. Street after street, and all the folks asleep – street after street, all lighted up as if for a procession and all as empty as a church – till at last I got into that state of mind when a man listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman. All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross street. Well, sir, the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child’s body and left her screaming on the ground. It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It wasn’t like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut. I gave a view halloa, took to my heels, collared my gentleman, and brought him back to where there was already quite a group about the screaming child. He was perfectly cool and made no resistance, but gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out the sweat on me like running. The people who had turned out were the girl’s own family; and pretty soon, the doctor, for whom she had been sent, put in his appearance. Well, the child was not much the worse, more frightened, according to the Sawbones; and there you might have supposed would be an end to it. But there was one curious circumstance. I had taken a loathing to my gentleman at first sight. So had the child’s family, which was only natural. But the doctor’s case was what struck me. He was the usual cut and dry apothecary, of no particular age and colour, with a strong Edinburgh accent, and about as emotional as a bagpipe. Well, sir, he was like the rest of us; every time he looked at my prisoner, I saw that Sawbones turn sick and white with desire to kill him. I knew what was in his mind, just as he knew what was in mine; and killing being out of the question, we did the next best. We told the man we could and would make such a scandal out of this, as should make his name stink from one end of London to the other. If he had any friends or any credit, we undertook that he should lose them. And all the time, as we were pitching it in red hot, we were keeping the women off him as best we could, for they were as wild as harpies. I never saw a circle of such hateful faces; and there was the man in the middle, with a kind of black, sneering coolness – frightened too, I could see that – but

carrying it off, sir, really like Satan. “If you choose to make capital out of this accident,” said he, “I am naturally helpless. No gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene,” says he. “Name your figure.” Well, we screwed him up to a hundred pounds for the child’s family; he would have clearly liked to stick out; but there was something about the lot of us that meant mischief, and at last he struck. The next thing was to get the money; and where do you think he carried us but to that place with the door? – whipped out a key, went in, and presently came back with the matter of ten pounds in gold and a cheque for the balance on Coutts’s, drawn payable to bearer and signed with a name that I can’t mention, though it’s one of the points of my story, but it was a name at least very well known and often printed. The figure was stiff; but the signature was good for more than that, if it was only genuine. I took the liberty of pointing out to my gentleman that the whole business looked apocryphal, and that a man does not, in real life, walk into a cellar door at four in the morning and come out with another man’s cheque for close upon a hundred pounds. But he was quite easy and sneering. “Set your mind at rest,” says he, “I will stay with you till the banks open and cash the cheque myself.” So we all set off, the doctor, and the child’s father, and our friend and myself, and passed the rest of the night in my chambers; and next day, when we had breakfasted, went in a body to the bank. I gave in the cheque myself, and said I had every reason to believe it was a forgery. Not a bit of it. The cheque was genuine.’

‘Tut-tut,’ said Mr Utterson.

‘I see you feel as I do,’ said Mr Enfield. ‘Yes, it’s a bad story. For my man was a fellow that nobody could have to do with, a really damnable man; and the person that drew the cheque is the very pink of the proprieties, celebrated too, and (what makes it worse) one of your fellows who do what they call good. Black mail, I suppose; an honest man paying through the nose for some of the capers of his youth. Black Mail House is what I call the place with the door, in consequence. Though even that, you know, is far from explaining all,’ he added, and with the words fell into a vein of musing.

From this he was recalled by Mr Utterson asking rather suddenly: ‘And you don’t know if the drawer of the cheque lives there?’

‘A likely place, isn’t it?’ returned Mr Enfield. ‘But I happen to have noticed his address; he lives in some square or other.’

‘And you never asked about the – place with the door?’ said Mr Utterson.

‘No, sir: I had a delicacy,’ was the reply. ‘I feel very strongly about putting questions; it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment. You start a question, and it’s like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of a hill; and away the stone goes, starting others; and presently some bland old bird (the last you would have thought of) is knocked on the head in his own back garden and the family have to change their name. No sir, I make it a rule of mine: the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask.’

‘A very good rule, too,’ said the lawyer.

‘But I have studied the place for myself,’ continued Mr Enfield. ‘It seems scarcely a house. There is no other door, and nobody goes in or out of that one but, once in a great while, the gentleman of my adventure. There are three windows looking on the court on the first floor; none below; the windows are always shut but they’re clean. And then there is a chimney which is generally smoking; so somebody must live there. And yet it’s not so sure; for the buildings are so packed together about the court, that it’s hard to say where one ends and another begins.’

The pair walked on again for a while in silence; and then ‘Enfield,’ said Mr Utterson, ‘that’s a good rule of yours.’

‘Yes, I think it is,’ returned Enfield.

‘But for all that,’ continued the lawyer, ‘there’s one point I want to ask: I want to ask the name of that man who walked over the child.’

‘Well,’ said Mr Enfield, ‘I can’t see what harm it would do. It was a man of the name of Hyde.’

‘Hm,’ said Mr Utterson. ‘What sort of a man is he to see?’

‘He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something down-right detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point. He’s an extraordinary looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way. No, sir; I can make no hand of it; I can’t describe him. And it’s not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment.’

Mr Utterson again walked some way in silence and obviously under a weight of consideration. ‘You are sure he used a key?’ he inquired at last.

‘My dear sir … began Enfield, surprised out of himself.

‘Yes, I know,’ said Utterson; ‘I know it must seem strange. The fact is, if I do not ask you the name of the other party, it is because I know it already. You see, Richard, your tale has gone home. If you have been inexact in any point, you had better correct it.’

‘I think you might have warned me,’ returned the other with a touch of sullenness. ‘But I have been pedantically exact, as you call it. The fellow had a key; and what’s more, he has it still. I saw him use it, not a week ago.’

Mr Utterson sighed deeply but said never a word; and the young man presently resumed. ‘Here is another lesson to say nothing,’ said he. ‘I am ashamed of my long tongue. Let us make a bargain never to refer to this again.’

‘With all my heart,’ said the lawyer. ‘I shake hands on that, Richard.’

Search for Mr Hyde

That evening Mr Utterson came home to his bachelor house in sombre spirits and sat down to dinner without relish. It was his custom of a Sunday, when this meal was over, to sit close by the fire, a volume of some dry divinity on his reading desk, until the clock of the neighbouring church rang out the hour of twelve, when he would go soberly and gratefully to bed. On this night, however, as soon as the cloth was taken away, he took up a candle and went into his business room. There he opened his safe, took from the most private part of it a document endorsed on the envelope as Dr Jekyll's Will, and sat down with a clouded brow to study its contents. The will was holograph, for Mr Utterson, though he took charge of it now that it was made, had refused to lend the least assistance in the making of it; it provided not only that, in case of the decease of Henry Jekyll, MD, DCL, LLD, FRS, etc, all his possessions were to pass into the hands of his 'friend and benefactor Edward Hyde,' but that in case of Dr Jekyll's 'disappearance or unexplained absence for any period exceeding three calendar months,' the said Edward Hyde should step into the said Henry Jekyll's shoes without further delay and free from any burthen or obligation, beyond the payment of a few small sums to the members of the doctor's household. This document had long been the lawyer's eyesore. It offended him both as a lawyer and as a lover of the sane and customary sides of life, to whom the fanciful was the immodest. And hitherto it was his ignorance of Mr Hyde that had swelled his indignation; now, by a sudden turn, it was his knowledge. It was already bad enough when the name was but a name of which he could learn no more. It was worse when it began to be clothed upon with detestable attributes; and out of the shifting, insubstantial mists that had so long baffled his eye, there leaped up the sudden, definite presentment of a fiend.

‘I thought it was madness,’ he said, as he replaced the obnoxious paper in the safe, ‘and now I begin to fear it is disgrace.’

With that he blew out his candle, put on a greatcoat, and set forth in the direction of Cavendish Square, that citadel of medicine, where his friend, the great Dr Lanyon, had his house and received his crowding patients. ‘If anyone knows, it will be Lanyon,’ he had thought.

The solemn butler knew and welcomed him; he was subjected to no stage of delay, but ushered direct from the door to the dining-room where Dr Lanyon sat alone over his wine. This was a hearty, healthy, dapper, red-faced gentleman, with a shock of hair prematurely white, and a boisterous and decided manner. At sight of Mr Utterson, he sprang up from his chair and welcomed him with both hands. The geniality, as was the way of the man, was somewhat theatrical to the eye; but it reposed on genuine feeling. For these two were old friends, old mates both at school and college, both thorough respectors of themselves and of each other, and what does not always follow, men who thoroughly enjoyed each other’s company.

After a little rambling talk, the lawyer led up to the subject which so disagreeably preoccupied his mind.

‘I suppose, Lanyon,’ said he, ‘you and I must be the two oldest friends that Henry Jekyll has?’

‘I wish the friends were younger,’ chuckled Dr Lanyon. ‘But I suppose we are. And what of that? I see little of him now.’

‘Indeed?’ said Utterson. ‘I thought you had a bond of common interest.’

‘We had,’ was the reply. ‘But it is more than ten years since Henry Jekyll became too fanciful for me. He began to go wrong, wrong in mind; and though of course I continue to take an interest in him for old sake’s sake, as they say, I see and I have seen devilish little of the man. Such unscientific balderdash,’ added the doctor, flushing suddenly purple, ‘would have estranged Damon and Pythias.’

This little spirit of temper was somewhat of a relief to Mr Utterson. ‘They have only differed on some point of science,’ he thought; and being a man of no scientific passions (except in the matter of conveyancing), he even added: ‘It is nothing worse than that!’ He gave his friend a few seconds to recover his composure, and then approached the question he had come to put. ‘Did you ever come across a protégé of his – one Hyde?’ he asked.

‘Hyde?’ repeated Lanyon. ‘No. Never heard of him. Since my time.’

That was the amount of information that the lawyer carried back with him to the great, dark bed on which he tossed to and fro, until the small hours of the morning began to grow large. It was a night of little ease to his toiling mind, toiling in mere darkness and besieged by questions.

Six o’clock struck on the bells of the church that was so conveniently near to Mr Utterson’s dwelling, and still he was digging at the problem. Hitherto it had touched him on the intellectual side alone; but now his imagination also was engaged, or rather enslaved; and as he lay and tossed in the gross darkness of the night and the curtained room, Mr Enfield’s tale went by before his mind in a scroll of lighted pictures. He would be aware of the great field of lamps of a nocturnal city; then of the figure of a man walking swiftly; then of a child running from the doctor’s; and then these met, and that human Juggernaut trod the child down and passed on regardless of her screams. Or else he would see a room in a rich house, where his friend lay asleep, dreaming and smiling at his dreams; and then the door of that room would be opened, the curtains of the bed plucked apart, the sleeper recalled, and lo! there would stand by his side a figure to whom power was given, and even at that dead hour, he must rise and do its bidding. The figure in these two phases haunted the lawyer all night; and if at any time he dozed over, it was but to see it glide more stealthily through sleeping houses, or move the more swiftly and still the more swiftly, even to dizziness, through wider labyrinths of lamplighted city, and at every street corner crush a child and leave her screaming. And still the figure had no face by which he might know it; even in his dreams, it had no face, or one that baffled him and melted before his eyes; and thus it was that there sprang up and grew apace in the lawyer’s mind a singularly strong, almost an inordinate, curiosity to behold the features of the real Mr Hyde. If he could but once set eyes on him, he thought the mystery would lighten and perhaps roll altogether away, as was the habit of mysterious things when well examined. He might see a reason for his friend’s strange preference or bondage (call it which you please) and even for the startling clause of the will. At least it would be a face worth seeing: the face of a man who was without bowels of mercy: a face which had but to show itself to raise up, in the mind of the unimpressionable Enfield, a spirit of enduring hatred.

From that time forward, Mr Utterson began to haunt the door in the by-street of shops. In the morning before office hours, at noon when business was plenty, and time scarce, at night under the face of the fogged city moon, by all lights and at all hours of solitude or concourse, the lawyer was to be found on his chosen post.

'If he be Mr Hyde,' he had thought, 'I shall be Mr Seek.'

And at last his patience was rewarded. It was a fine dry night; frost in the air; the streets as clean as a ballroom floor; the lamps, unshaken by any wind, drawing a regular pattern of light and shadow. By ten o'clock, when the shops were closed, the by-street was very solitary and, in spite of the low growl of London from all round, very silent. Small sounds carried far; domestic sounds out of the houses were clearly audible on either side of the roadway; and the rumour of the approach of any passenger preceded him by a long time. Mr Utterson had been some minutes at his post, when he was aware of an odd, light footstep drawing near. In the course of his nightly patrols, he had long grown accustomed to the quaint effect with which the footfalls of a single person, while he is still a great way off, suddenly spring out distinct from the vast hum and clatter of the city. Yet his attention had never before been so sharply and decisively arrested; and it was with a strong, superstitious prevision of success that he withdrew into the entry of the court.

The steps drew swiftly nearer, and swelled out suddenly louder as they turned the end of the street. The lawyer, looking forth from the entry, could soon see what manner of man he had to deal with. He was small and very plainly dressed, and the look of him, even at that distance, went somehow strongly against the watcher's inclination. But he made straight for the door, crossing the roadway to save time; and as he came, he drew a key from his pocket like one approaching home.

Mr Utterson stepped out and touched him on the shoulder as he passed. 'Mr Hyde, I think?'

Mr Hyde shrank back with a hissing intake of the breath. But his fear was only momentary; and though he did not look the lawyer in the face, he answered coolly enough: 'That is my name. What do you want?'

'I see you are going in,' returned the lawyer. 'I am an old friend of Dr Jekyll's – Mr Utterson of Gaunt Street – you must have heard of my name; and meeting you so conveniently, I thought you might admit me.'

‘You will not find Dr Jekyll; he is from home,’ replied Mr Hyde, blowing in the key. And then suddenly, but still without looking up, ‘How did you know me?’ he asked.

‘On your side,’ said Mr Utterson, ‘will you do me a favour?’

‘With pleasure,’ replied the other. ‘What shall it be?’

‘Will you let me see your face?’ asked the lawyer.

Mr Hyde appeared to hesitate, and then, as if upon some sudden reflection, fronted about with an air of defiance; and the pair stared at each other pretty fixedly for a few seconds. ‘Now I shall know you again,’ said Mr Utterson. ‘It may be useful.’

‘Yes,’ returned Mr Hyde, ‘it is as well we have met; and *à propos*, you should have my address.’ And he gave a number of a street in Soho.

‘Good God!’ thought Mr Utterson, ‘can he, too, have been thinking of the will?’ But he kept his feelings to himself and only grunted in acknowledgment of the address.

‘And now,’ said the other, ‘how did you know me?’

‘By description,’ was the reply.

‘Whose description?’

‘We have common friends,’ said Mr Utterson.

‘Common friends?’ echoed Mr Hyde, a little hoarsely. ‘Who are they?’

‘Jekyll, for instance,’ said the lawyer.

‘He never told you,’ cried Mr Hyde, with a flush of anger. ‘I did not think you would have lied.’

‘Come,’ said Mr Utterson, ‘that is not fitting language.’

The other snarled aloud into a savage laugh; and the next moment, with extraordinary quickness, he had unlocked the door and disappeared into the house.

The lawyer stood awhile when Mr Hyde had left him, the picture of disquietude. Then he began slowly to mount the street, pausing every step or two and putting his hand to his brow like a man in mental perplexity. The problem he was thus debating as he walked, was one of a class that is rarely solved. Mr Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of

these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr Utterson regarded him. ‘There must be something else,’ said the perplexed gentleman. ‘There *is* something more, if I could find a name for it. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? or can it be the old story of Dr Fell? or is it the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures, its clay continent? The last, I think; for, O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan’s signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend.’

Round the corner from the by-street, there was a square of ancient, handsome houses, now for the most part decayed from their high estate and let in flats and chambers to all sorts and conditions of men; map-engravers, architects, shady lawyers and the agents of obscure enterprises. One house, however, second from the corner, was still occupied entire; and at the door of this, which wore a great air of wealth and comfort, though it was now plunged in darkness except for the fanlight, Mr Utterson stopped and knocked. A well-dressed, elderly servant opened the door.

‘Is Dr Jekyll at home, Poole?’ asked the lawyer.

‘I will see, Mr Utterson,’ said Poole, admitting the visitor, as he spoke, into a large, low-roofed, comfortable hall, paved with flags, warmed (after the fashion of a country house) by a bright, open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak. ‘Will you wait here by the fire, sir? or shall I give you a light in the dining-room?’

‘Here, thank you,’ said the lawyer, and he drew near and leaned on the tall fender. This hall, in which he was now left alone, was a pet fancy of his friend the doctor’s; and Utterson himself was wont to speak of it as the pleasantest room in London. But tonight there was a shudder in his blood; the face of Hyde sat heavy on his memory; he felt (what was rare with him) a nausea and distaste of life; and in the gloom of his spirits, he seemed to read a menace in the flickering of the firelight on the polished cabinets and the uneasy starting of the shadow on the roof. He was ashamed of his relief, when Poole presently returned to announce that Dr Jekyll was gone out.

‘I saw Mr Hyde go in by the old dissecting-room door, Poole,’ he said. ‘Is that right, when Dr Jekyll is from home?’

‘Quite right, Mr Utterson, sir,’ replied the servant. ‘Mr Hyde has a key.’

‘Your master seems to repose a great deal of trust in that young man, Poole,’ resumed the other musingly.

‘Yes, sir, he does indeed,’ said Poole. ‘We have all orders to obey him.’

‘I do not think I ever met Mr Hyde?’ asked Utterson.

‘O, dear no, sir. He never *dines* here,’ replied the butler. ‘Indeed we see very little of him on this side of the house; he mostly comes and goes by the laboratory.’

‘Well, good-night, Poole.’

‘Good-night, Mr Utterson.’

And the lawyer set out homeward with a very heavy heart. ‘Poor Harry Jekyll,’ he thought, ‘my mind misgives me he is in deep waters! He was wild when he was young; a long while ago to be sure; but in the law of God, there is no statute of limitations. Ay, it must be that; the ghost of some old sin, the cancer of some concealed disgrace: punishment coming, *pede claudo*, years after memory has forgotten and self-love condoned the fault.’ And the lawyer, scared by the thought, brooded awhile on his own past, groping in all the corners of memory, lest by chance some Jack-in-the-Box of an old iniquity should leap to light there. His past was fairly blameless; few men could read the rolls of their life with less apprehension; yet he was humbled to the dust by the many ill things he had done, and raised up again into a sober and fearful gratitude by the many he had come so near to doing, yet avoided. And then by a return on his former subject, he conceived a spark of hope. ‘This Master Hyde, if he were studied,’ thought he, ‘must have secrets of his own; black secrets, by the look of him; secrets compared to which poor Jekyll’s worst would be like sunshine. Things cannot continue as they are. It turns me cold to think of this creature stealing like a thief to Harry’s bedside; poor Harry, what a wakening! And the danger of it; for if this Hyde suspects the existence of the will, he may grow impatient to inherit. Ay, I must put my shoulders to the wheel – if Jekyll will but let me,’ he added, ‘if Jekyll will only let me.’ For once more he saw before his mind’s eye, as clear as transparency, the strange clauses of the will.

Dr Jekyll was Quite at Ease

A fortnight later, by excellent good fortune, the doctor gave one of his pleasant dinners to some five or six old cronies, all intelligent, reputable men and all judges of good wine; and Mr Utterson so contrived that he remained behind after the others had departed. This was no new arrangement, but a thing that had befallen many scores of times. Where Utterson was liked, he was liked well. Hosts loved to detain the dry lawyer, when the light-hearted and loose-tongued had already their foot on the threshold; they liked to sit awhile in his unobtrusive company, practising for solitude, sobering their minds in the man's rich silence after the expense and strain of gaiety. To this rule, Dr Jekyll was no exception; and as he now sat on the opposite side of the fire – a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of a slyish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness – you could see by his looks that he cherished for Mr Utterson a sincere and warm affection.

'I have been wanting to speak to you, Jekyll,' began the latter. 'You know that will of yours?'

A close observer might have gathered that the topic was distasteful; but the doctor carried it off gaily. 'My poor Utterson,' said he, 'you are unfortunate in such a client. I never saw a man so distressed as you were by my will; unless it were that hide-bound pedant, Lanyon, at what he called my scientific heresies. O, I know he's a good fellow – you needn't frown – an excellent fellow, and I always mean to see more of him; but a hide-bound pedant for all that; an ignorant, blatant pedant. I was never more disappointed in any man than Lanyon.'

'You know I never approved of it,' pursued Utterson, ruthlessly disregarding the fresh topic.

'My will? Yes, certainly, I know that,' said the doctor, a trifle sharply. 'You have told me so.'

‘Well, I tell you so again,’ continued the lawyer. ‘I have been learning something of young Hyde.’

The large handsome face of Dr Jekyll grew pale to the very lips, and there came a blackness about his eyes. ‘I do not care to hear more,’ said he. ‘This is a matter I thought we had agreed to drop.’

‘What I heard was abominable,’ said Utterson.

‘It can make no change. You do not understand my position,’ returned the doctor, with a certain incoherency of manner. ‘I am painfully situated, Utterson; my position is a very strange – a very strange one. It is one of those affairs that cannot be mended by talking.’

‘Jekyll,’ said Utterson, ‘you know me: I am a man to be trusted. Make a clean breast of this in confidence; and I make no doubt I can get you out of it.’

‘My good Utterson,’ said the doctor, ‘this is very good of you, this is downright good of you, and I cannot find words to thank you in. I believe you fully; I would trust you before any man alive, ay, before myself, if I could make the choice; but indeed it isn’t what you fancy; it is not as bad as that; and just to put your good heart at rest, I will tell you one thing: the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr Hyde. I give you my hand upon that; and I thank you again and again; and I will just add one little word, Utterson, that I’m sure you’ll take in good part: this is a private matter, and I beg of you to let it sleep.’

Utterson reflected a little, looking in the fire.

‘I have no doubt you are perfectly right,’ he said at last, getting to his feet.

‘Well, but since we have touched upon this business, and for the last time I hope,’ continued the doctor, ‘there is one point I should like you to understand. I have really a very great interest in poor Hyde. I know you have seen him; he told me so; and I fear he was rude. But I do sincerely take a great, a very great interest in that young man; and if I am taken away, Utterson, I wish you to promise me that you will bear with him and get his rights for him. I think you would, if you knew all; and it would be a weight off my mind if you would promise.’

‘I can’t pretend that I shall ever like him,’ said the lawyer.

‘I don’t ask that,’ pleaded Jekyll, laying his hand upon the other’s arm; ‘I only ask for justice; I only ask you to help him for my sake, when I am no

longer here.’

Utterson heaved an irrepressible sigh. ‘Well,’ said he, ‘I promise.’

The Carew Murder Case

Nearly a year later, in the month of October, 18—,London was startled by a crime of singular ferocity and rendered all the more notable by the high position of the victim. The details were few and startling. A maid servant living alone in a house not far from the river, had gone upstairs to bed about eleven. Although a fog rolled over the city in the small hours, the early part of the night was cloudless, and the lane, which the maid's window overlooked, was brilliantly lit by the full moon. It seems she was romantically given, for she sat down upon her box, which stood immediately under the window, and fell into a dream of musing. Never (she used to say, with streaming tears, when she narrated that experience), never had she felt more at peace with all men or thought more kindly of the world. And as she so sat she became aware of an aged beautiful gentleman with white hair, drawing near along the lane; and advancing to meet him, another and very small gentleman, to whom at first she paid less attention. When they had come within speech (which was just under the maid's eyes) the older man bowed and accosted the other with a very pretty manner of politeness. It did not seem as if the subject of his address were of great importance; indeed, from his pointing, it sometimes appeared as if he were only inquiring his way; but the moon shone on his face as he spoke, and the girl was pleased to watch it, it seemed to breathe such an innocent and old-world kindness of disposition, yet with something high too, as of a well-founded self-content. Presently her eye wandered to the other, and she was surprised to recognise in him a certain Mr Hyde, who had once visited her master and for whom she had conceived a dislike. He had in his hand a heavy cane, with which he was trifling; but he answered never a word, and seemed to listen with an ill-contained impatience. And then all of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. The old

gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And the next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted.

It was two o'clock when she came to herself and called for the police. The murderer was gone long ago; but there lay his victim in the middle of the lane, incredibly mangled. The stick with which the deed had been done, although it was of some rare and very tough and heavy wood, had broken in the middle under the stress of this insensate cruelty; and one splintered half had rolled in the neighbouring gutter – the other, without doubt, had been carried away by the murderer. A purse and gold watch were found upon the victim: but no cards or papers, except a sealed and stamped envelope, which he had been probably carrying to the post, and which bore the name and address of Mr Utterson.

This was brought to the lawyer the next morning, before he was out of bed; and he had no sooner seen it, and been told the circumstances, than he shot out a solemn lip. 'I shall say nothing till I have seen the body,' said he; 'this may be very serious. Have the kindness to wait while I dress.' And with the same grave countenance he hurried through his breakfast and drove to the police station, whither the body had been carried. As soon as he came into the cell, he nodded.

'Yes,' said he, 'I recognise him. I am sorry to say that this is Sir Danvers Carew.'

'Good God, sir,' exclaimed the officer, 'is it possible?' And the next moment his eye lighted up with professional ambition. 'This will make a deal of noise,' he said. 'And perhaps you can help us to the man.' And he briefly narrated what the maid had seen, and showed the broken stick.

Mr Utterson had already quailed at the name of Hyde; but when the stick was laid before him, he could doubt no longer; broken and battered as it was, he recognized it for one that he had himself presented many years before to Henry Jekyll.

'Is this Mr Hyde a person of small stature?' he inquired.

'Particularly small and particularly wicked-looking, is what the maid calls him,' said the officer.

Mr Utterson reflected; and then, raising his head, ‘If you will come with me in my cab,’ he said, ‘I think I can take you to his house.’

It was by this time about nine in the morning, and the first fog of the season. A great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven, but the wind was continually charging and routing these embattled vapours; so that as the cab crawled from street to street, Mr Utterson beheld a marvelous number of degrees and hues of twilight; for here it would be dark like the back-end of evening; and there would be a glow of a rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration; and here, for a moment, the fog would be quite broken up, and a haggard shaft of daylight would glance in between the swirling wreaths. The dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful reinvasion of darkness, seemed, in the lawyer’s eyes, like a district of some city in a nightmare. The thoughts of his mind, besides, were of the gloomiest dye; and when he glanced at the companion of his drive, he was conscious of some touch of that terror of the law and the law’s officers, which may at times assail the most honest.

As the cab drew up before the address indicated, the fog lifted a little and showed him a dingy street, a gin palace, a low French eating house, a shop for the retail of penny numbers and twopenny salads, many ragged children huddled in the doorways, and many women of many different nationalities passing out, key in hand, to have a morning glass; and the next moment the fog settled down again upon that part, as brown as umber, and cut him off from his blackguardly surroundings. This was the home of Henry Jekyll’s favourite; of a man who was heir to a quarter of a million sterling.

An ivory-faced and silvery-haired old woman opened the door. She had an evil face, smoothed by hypocrisy: but her manners were excellent. Yes, she said, this was Mr Hyde’s, but he was not at home; he had been in that night very late, but he had gone away again in less than an hour; there was nothing strange in that; his habits were very irregular, and he was often absent; for instance, it was nearly two months since she had seen him till yesterday.

‘Very well, then, we wish to see his rooms,’ said the lawyer; and when the woman began to declare it was impossible, ‘I had better tell you who this person is,’ he added. ‘This is Inspector Newcomen of Scotland Yard.’

A flash of odious joy appeared upon the woman's face. 'Ah!' said she, 'he is in trouble! What has he done?'

Mr Utterson and the inspector exchanged glances. 'He don't seem a very popular character,' observed the latter. 'And now, my good woman, just let me and this gentleman have a look about us.'

In the whole extent of the house, which but for the old woman remained otherwise empty, Mr Hyde had only used a couple of rooms; but these were furnished with luxury and good taste. A closet was filled with wine; the plate was of silver, the napery elegant; a good picture hung upon the walls, a gift (as Utterson supposed) from Henry Jekyll, who was much of a connoisseur; and the carpets were of many plies and agreeable in colour. At this moment, however, the rooms bore every mark of having been recently and hurriedly ransacked; clothes lay about the floor, with their pockets inside out; lock-fast drawers stood open; and on the hearth there lay a pile of grey ashes, as though many papers had been burned. From these embers the inspector disinterred the butt end of a green cheque book, which had resisted the action of the fire; the other half of the stick was found behind the door; and as this clinched his suspicions, the officer declared himself delighted. A visit to the bank, where several thousand pounds were found to be lying to the murderer's credit, completed his gratification.

'You may depend upon it, sir,' he told Mr Utterson: 'I have him in my hand. He must have lost his head, or he never would have left the stick or, above all, burned the cheque book. Why, money's life to the man. We have nothing to do but wait for him at the bank, and get out the handbills.'

This last, however, was not so easy of accomplishment; for Mr Hyde had numbered few familiars – even the master of the servant maid had only seen him twice; his family could nowhere be traced; he had never been photographed; and the few who could describe him differed widely, as common observers will. Only on one point were they agreed; and that was the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity with which the fugitive impressed his beholders.

Incident of the Letter

It was late in the afternoon, when Mr Utterson found his way to Dr Jekyll's door, where he was at once admitted by Poole, and carried down by the kitchen offices and across a yard which had once been a garden, to the building which was indifferently known as the laboratory or dissecting rooms. The doctor had bought the house from the heirs of a celebrated surgeon; and his own tastes being rather chemical than anatomical, had changed the destination of the block at the bottom of the garden. It was the first time that the lawyer had been received in that part of his friend's quarters; and he eyed the dingy, windowless structure with curiosity, and gazed round with a distasteful sense of strangeness as he crossed the theatre, once crowded with eager students and now lying gaunt and silent, the tables laden with chemical apparatus, the floor strewn with crates and littered with packing straw, and the light falling dimly through the foggy cupola. At the further end, a flight of stairs mounted to a door covered with red baize; and through this, Mr Utterson was at last received into the doctor's cabinet. It was a large room fitted round with glass presses, furnished, among other things, with a cheval-glass and a business table, and looking out upon the court by three dusty windows barred with iron. The fire burned in the grate; a lamp was set lighted on the chimney shelf, for even in the houses the fog began to lie thickly; and there, close up to the warmth, sat Dr Jekyll, looking deathly sick. He did not rise to meet his visitor, but held out a cold hand and bade him welcome in a changed voice.

'And now,' said Mr Utterson, as soon as Poole had left them, 'you have heard the news?'

The doctor shuddered. 'They were crying it in the square,' he said. 'I heard them in my dining-room.'

'One word,' said the lawyer. 'Carew was my client, but so are you, and I want to know what I am doing. You have not been mad enough to hide this

fellow?'

'Utterson, I swear to God,' cried the doctor, 'I swear to God I will never set eyes on him again. I bind my honour to you that I am done with him in this world. It is all at an end. And indeed he does not want my help; you do not know him as I do; he is safe, he is quite safe; mark my words, he will never more be heard of.'

The lawyer listened gloomily; he did not like his friend's feverish manner. 'You seem pretty sure of him,' said he; 'and for your sake, I hope you may be right. If it came to a trial, your name might appear.'

'I am quite sure of him,' replied Jekyll; 'I have grounds for certainty that I cannot share with anyone. But there is one thing on which you may advise me. I have – I have received a letter; and I am at a loss whether I should show it to the police. I should like to leave it in your hands, Utterson; you would judge wisely, I am sure; I have so great a trust in you.'

'You fear, I suppose, that it might lead to his detection?' asked the lawyer.

'No,' said the other. 'I cannot say that I care what becomes of Hyde; I am quite done with him. I was thinking of my own character, which this hateful business has rather exposed.'

Utterson ruminated awhile; he was surprised at his friend's selfishness, and yet relieved by it. 'Well,' said he, at last, 'let me see the letter.'

The letter was written in an odd, upright hand and signed 'Edward Hyde': and it signified, briefly enough, that the writer's benefactor, Dr Jekyll, whom he had long so unworthily repaid for a thousand generosities, need labour under no alarm for his safety, as he had means of escape on which he placed a sure dependence. The lawyer liked this letter well enough; it put a better colour on the intimacy than he had looked for; and he blamed himself for some of his past suspicions.

'Have you the envelope?' he asked.

'I burned it,' replied Jekyll, 'before I thought what I was about. But it bore no postmark. The note was handed in.'

'Shall I keep this and sleep upon it?' asked Utterson.

'I wish you to judge for me entirely,' was the reply. 'I have lost confidence in myself.'

'Well, I shall consider,' returned the lawyer. 'And now one word more: it was Hyde who dictated the terms in your will about that disappearance?'

The doctor seemed seized with a qualm of faintness; he shut his mouth tight and nodded.

‘I knew it,’ said Utterson. ‘He meant to murder you. You had a fine escape.’

‘I have had what is far more to the purpose,’ returned the doctor solemnly: ‘I have had a lesson— O God, Utterson, what a lesson I have had!’ And he covered his face for a moment with his hands.

On his way out, the lawyer stopped and had a word or two with Poole. ‘By the bye,’ said he, ‘there was a letter handed in to-day: what was the messenger like?’ But Poole was positive nothing had come except by post; ‘and only circulars by that,’ he added.

This news sent off the visitor with his fears renewed. Plainly the letter had come by the laboratory door; possibly, indeed, it had been written in the cabinet; and if that were so, it must be differently judged, and handled with the more caution. The newsboys, as he went, were crying themselves hoarse along the footways: ‘Special edition. Shocking murder of an MP’ That was the funeral oration of one friend and client; and he could not help a certain apprehension lest the good name of another should be sucked down in the eddy of the scandal. It was, at least, a ticklish decision that he had to make; and self-reliant as he was by habit, he began to cherish a longing for advice. It was not to be had directly; but perhaps, he thought, it might be fished for.

Presently after, he sat on one side of his own hearth, with Mr Guest, his head clerk, upon the other, and midway between, at a nicely calculated distance from the fire, a bottle of a particular old wine that had long dwelt unsunned in the foundations of his house. The fog still slept on the wing above the drowned city, where the lamps glimmered like carbuncles; and through the muffle and smother of these fallen clouds, the procession of the town’s life was still rolling in through the great arteries with a sound as of a mighty wind. But the room was gay with firelight. In the bottle the acids were long ago resolved; the imperial dye had softened with time, as the colour grows richer in stained windows; and the glow of hot autumn afternoons on hillside vineyards, was ready to be set free and to disperse the fogs of London. Insensibly the lawyer melted. There was no man from whom he kept fewer secrets than Mr Guest; and he was not always sure that he kept as many as he meant. Guest had often been on business to the doctor’s; he knew Poole; he could scarce have failed to hear of Mr Hyde’s

familiarity about the house; he might draw conclusions: was it not as well, then, that he should see a letter which put that mystery to rights? and above all since Guest, being a great student and critic of handwriting, would consider the step natural and obliging? The clerk, besides, was a man of counsel; he could scarce read so strange a document without dropping a remark; and by that remark Mr Utterson might shape his future course.

'This is a sad business about Sir Danvers,' he said.

'Yes, sir, indeed. It has elicited a great deal of public feeling,' returned Guest. 'The man, of course, was mad.'

'I should like to hear your views on that,' replied Utterson. 'I have a document here in his handwriting; it is between ourselves, for I scarce know what to do about it; it is an ugly business at the best. But there it is; quite in your way: a murderer's autograph.'

Guest's eyes brightened, and he sat down at once and studied it with passion. 'No sir,' he said: 'not mad; but it is an odd hand.'

'And by all accounts a very odd writer,' added the lawyer.

Just then the servant entered with a note.

'Is that from Dr Jekyll, sir?' inquired the clerk. 'I thought I knew the writing. Anything private, Mr Utterson?'

'Only an invitation to dinner. Why? Do you want to see it?'

'One moment. I thank you, sir;' and the clerk laid the two sheets of paper alongside and sedulously compared their contents. 'Thank you, sir,' he said at last, returning both; 'it's a very interesting autograph.'

There was a pause, during which Mr Utterson struggled with himself. 'Why did you compare them, Guest?' he inquired suddenly.

'Well, sir,' returned the clerk, 'there's a rather singular resemblance; the two hands are in many points identical: only differently sloped.'

'Rather quaint,' said Utterson.

'It is, as you say, rather quaint,' returned Guest.

'I wouldn't speak of this note, you know,' said the master.

'No, sir,' said the clerk. 'I understand.'

But no sooner was Mr Utterson alone that night, than he locked the note into his safe, where it reposed from that time forward. 'What!' he thought. 'Henry Jekyll forge for a murderer!' And his blood ran cold in his veins.

Remarkable Incident of Dr Lanyon

Time ran on; thousands of pounds were offered in reward, for the death of Sir Danvers was resented as a public injury; but Mr Hyde had disappeared out of the ken of the police as though he had never existed. Much of his past was unearthed, indeed, and all disreputable: tales came out of the man's cruelty, at once so callous and violent; of his vile life, of his strange associates, of the hatred that seemed to have surrounded his career; but of his present whereabouts, not a whisper. From the time he had left the house in Soho on the morning of the murder, he was simply blotted out; and gradually, as time drew on, Mr Utterson began to recover from the hotness of his alarm, and to grow more at quiet with himself. The death of Sir Danvers was, to his way of thinking, more than paid for by the disappearance of Mr Hyde. Now that that evil influence had been withdrawn, a new life began for Dr Jekyll. He came out of his seclusion, renewed relations with his friends, became once more their familiar guest and entertainer; and whilst he had always been known for charities, he was now no less distinguished for religion. He was busy, he was much in the open air, he did good; his face seemed to open and brighten, as if with an inward consciousness of service; and for more than two months, the doctor was at peace.

On the 8th of January Utterson had dined at the doctor's with a small party; Lanyon had been there; and the face of the host had looked from one to the other as in the old days when the trio were inseparable friends. On the 12th, and again on the 14th, the door was shut against the lawyer. 'The doctor was confined to the house,' Poole said, 'and saw no one.' On the 15th, he tried again, and was again refused; and having now been used for the last two months to see his friend almost daily, he found this return of solitude to weigh upon his spirits. The fifth night he had in Guest to dine with him; and the sixth he betook himself to Dr Lanyon's.

There at least he was not denied admittance; but when he came in, he was shocked at the change which had taken place in the doctor's appearance. He had his death-warrant written legibly upon his face. The rosy man had grown pale; his flesh had fallen away; he was visibly balder and older; and yet it was not so much these tokens of a swift physical decay that arrested the lawyer's notice, as a look in the eye and quality of manner that seemed to testify to some deep-seated terror of the mind. It was unlikely that the doctor should fear death; and yet that was what Utterson was tempted to suspect. 'Yes,' he thought; 'he is a doctor, he must know his own state and that his days are counted; and the knowledge is more than he can bear.' And yet when Utterson remarked on his ill-looks, it was with an air of great firmness that Lanyon declared himself a doomed man.

'I have had a shock,' he said, 'and I shall never recover. It is a question of weeks. Well, life has been pleasant; I liked it; yes, sir, I used to like it. I sometimes think if we knew all, we should be more glad to get away.'

'Jekyll is ill, too,' observed Utterson. 'Have you seen him?'

But Lanyon's face changed, and he held up a trembling hand. 'I wish to see or hear no more of Dr Jekyll,' he said in a loud, unsteady voice. 'I am quite done with that person; and I beg that you will spare me any allusion to one whom I regard as dead.'

'Tut-tut,' said Mr Utterson; and then after a considerable pause, 'Can't I do anything?' he inquired. 'We are three very old friends, Lanyon; we shall not live to make others.'

'Nothing can be done,' returned Lanyon; 'ask himself.'

'He will not see me,' said the lawyer.

'I am not surprised at that,' was the reply. 'Some day, Utterson, after I am dead, you may perhaps come to learn the right and wrong of this. I cannot tell you. And in the meantime, if you can sit and talk with me of other things, for God's sake, stay and do so; but if you cannot keep clear of this accursed topic, then in God's name, go, for I cannot bear it.'

As soon as he got home, Utterson sat down and wrote to Jekyll, complaining of his exclusion from the house, and asking the cause of this unhappy break with Lanyon; and the next day brought him a long answer, often very pathetically worded, and sometimes darkly mysterious in drift. The quarrel with Lanyon was incurable. 'I do not blame our old friend,' Jekyll wrote, 'but I share his view that we must never meet. I mean from

henceforth to lead a life of extreme seclusion; you must not be surprised, nor must you doubt my friendship, if my door is often shut even to you. You must suffer me to go my own dark way. I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also. I could not think that this earth contained a place for sufferings and terrors so unmanning; and you can do but one thing, Utterson, to lighten this destiny, and that is to respect my silence.' Utterson was amazed; the dark influence of Hyde had been withdrawn, the doctor had returned to his old tasks and amities; a week ago, the prospect had smiled with every promise of a cheerful and an honoured age; and now in a moment, friendship, and peace of mind, and the whole tenor of his life were wrecked. So great and unprepared a change pointed to madness; but in view of Lanyon's manner and words, there must lie for it some deeper ground.

A week afterwards Dr Lanyon took to his bed, and in something less than a fortnight he was dead. The night after the funeral, at which he had been sadly affected, Utterson locked the door of his business room, and sitting there by the light of a melancholy candle, drew out and set before him an envelope addressed by the hand and sealed with the seal of his dead friend. 'PRIVATE: for the hands of G. J. Utterson ALONE, and in case of his predecease *to be destroyed unread*,' so it was emphatically superscribed; and the lawyer dreaded to behold the contents. 'I have buried one friend to-day,' he thought: 'what if this should cost me another?' And then he condemned the fear as a disloyalty, and broke the seal. Within there was another enclosure, likewise sealed, and marked upon the cover as 'not to be opened till the death or disappearance of Dr Henry Jekyll.' Utterson could not trust his eyes. Yes, it was disappearance; here again, as in the mad will which he had long ago restored to its author, here again were the idea of a disappearance and the name of Henry Jekyll bracketted. But in the will, that idea had sprung from the sinister suggestion of the man Hyde; it was set there with a purpose all too plain and horrible. Written by the hand of Lanyon, what should it mean? A great curiosity came on the trustee, to disregard the prohibition and dive at once to the bottom of these mysteries; but professional honour and faith to his dead friend were stringent obligations; and the packet slept in the inmost corner of his private safe.

It is one thing to mortify curiosity, another to conquer it; and it may be doubted if, from that day forth, Utterson desired the society of his surviving friend with the same eagerness. He thought of him kindly; but his thoughts were disquieted and fearful. He went to call indeed; but he was perhaps relieved to be denied admittance; perhaps, in his heart, he preferred to speak with Poole upon the doorstep and surrounded by the air and sounds of the open city, rather than to be admitted into that house of voluntary bondage, and to sit and speak with its inscrutable recluse. Poole had, indeed, no very pleasant news to communicate. The doctor, it appeared, now more than ever confined himself to the cabinet over the laboratory, where he would sometimes even sleep; he was out of spirits, he had grown very silent, he did not read; it seemed as if he had something on his mind. Utterson became so used to the unvarying character of these reports, that he fell off little by little in the frequency of his visits.

Incident at the Window

It chanced on Sunday, when Mr Utterson was on his usual walk with Mr Enfield, that their way lay once again through the by-street; and that when they came in front of the door, both stopped to gaze on it.

'Well,' said Enfield, 'that story's at an end at least. We shall never see more of Mr Hyde.'

'I hope not,' said Utterson. 'Did I ever tell you that I once saw him, and shared your feeling of repulsion?'

'It was impossible to do the one without the other,' returned Enfield. 'And by the way, what an ass you must have thought me, not to know that this was a back way to Dr Jekyll's! It was partly your own fault that I found it out, even when I did.'

'So you found it out, did you?' said Utterson. 'But if that be so, we may step into the court and take a look at the windows. To tell you the truth, I am uneasy about poor Jekyll; and even outside, I feel as if the presence of a friend might do him good.'

The court was very cool and a little damp, and full of premature twilight, although the sky, high up overhead, was still bright with sunset. The middle one of the three windows was half-way open; and sitting close beside it, taking the air with an infinite sadness of mien, like some disconsolate prisoner, Utterson saw Dr Jekyll.

'What! Jekyll!' he cried. 'I trust you are better.'

'I am very low, Utterson,' replied the doctor drearily, 'very low. It will not last long, thank God.'

'You stay too much indoors,' said the lawyer. 'You should be out, whipping up the circulation like Mr Enfield and me. (This is my cousin – Mr Enfield – Dr Jekyll.) Come now; get your hat and take a quick turn with us.'

‘You are very good,’ sighed the other. ‘I should like to very much; but no, no, no, it is quite impossible; I dare not. But indeed, Utterson, I am very glad to see you; this is really a great pleasure; I would ask you and Mr Enfield up, but the place is really not fit.’

‘Why, then,’ said the lawyer, good-naturedly, ‘the best thing we can do is to stay down here and speak with you from where we are.’

‘That is just what I was about to venture to propose,’ returned the doctor with a smile. But the words were hardly uttered, before the smile was struck out of his face and succeeded by an expression of such abject terror and despair, as froze the very blood of the two gentlemen below. They saw it but for a glimpse for the window was instantly thrust down; but that glimpse had been sufficient, and they turned and left the court without a word. In silence, too, they traversed the by-street; and it was not until they had come into a neighbouring thoroughfare, where even upon a Sunday there were still some stirrings of life, that Mr Utterson at last turned and looked at his companion. They were both pale; and there was an answering horror in their eyes.

‘God forgive us, God forgive us,’ said Mr Utterson.

But Mr Enfield only nodded his head very seriously, and walked on once more in silence.

The Last Night

Mr Utterson was sitting by his fireside one evening after dinner, when he was surprised to receive a visit from Poole.

‘Bless me, Poole, what brings you here?’ he cried; and then taking a second look at him, ‘What ails you?’ he added; ‘is the doctor ill?’

‘Mr Utterson,’ said the man, ‘there is something wrong.’

‘Take a seat, and here is a glass of wine for you,’ said the lawyer. ‘Now, take your time, and tell me plainly what you want.’

‘You know the doctor’s ways, sir,’ replied Poole, ‘and how he shuts himself up. Well, he’s shut up again in the cabinet; and I don’t like it, sir – I wish I may die if I like it. Mr Utterson, sir, I’m afraid.’

‘Now, my good man,’ said the lawyer, ‘be explicit. What are you afraid of?’

‘I’ve been afraid for about a week,’ returned Poole, doggedly disregarding the question, ‘and I can bear it no more.’

The man’s appearance amply bore out his words; his manner was altered for the worse; and except for the moment when he had first announced his terror, he had not once looked the lawyer in the face. Even now, he sat with the glass of wine untasted on his knee, and his eyes directed to a corner of the floor. ‘I can bear it no more,’ he repeated.

‘Come,’ said the lawyer, ‘I see you have some good reason, Poole; I see there is something seriously amiss. Try to tell me what it is.’

‘I think there’s been foul play,’ said Poole, hoarsely.

‘Foul play!’ cried the lawyer, a good deal frightened and rather inclined to be irritated in consequence. ‘What foul play! What does the man mean?’

‘I daren’t say, sir,’ was the answer; ‘but will you come along with me and see for yourself?’

Mr Utterson’s only answer was to rise and get his hat and greatcoat; but he observed with wonder the greatness of the relief that appeared upon the

butler's face, and perhaps with no less, that the wine was still untasted when he set it down to follow.

It was a wild, cold, seasonable night of March, with a pale moon, lying on her back as though the wind had tilted her, and flying wrack of the most diaphanous and lawny texture. The wind made talking difficult, and flecked the blood into the face. It seemed to have swept the streets unusually bare of passengers, besides; for Mr Utterson thought he had never seen that part of London so deserted. He could have wished it otherwise; never in his life had he been conscious of so sharp a wish to see and touch his fellow-creatures; for struggle as he might, there was borne in upon his mind a crushing anticipation of calamity. The square, when they got there, was full of wind and dust, and the thin trees in the garden were lashing themselves along the railing. Poole, who had kept all the way a pace or two ahead, now pulled up in the middle of the pavement, and in spite of the biting weather, took off his hat and mopped his brow with a red pocket-handkerchief. But for all the hurry of his coming, these were not the dews of exertion that he wiped away, but the moisture of some strangling anguish; for his face was white and his voice, when he spoke, harsh and broken.

'Well, sir,' he said, 'here we are, and God grant there be nothing wrong.'

'Amen, Poole,' said the lawyer.

Thereupon the servant knocked in a very guarded manner; the door was opened on the chain; and a voice asked from within, 'Is that you, Poole?'

'It's all right,' said Poole. 'Open the door.'

The hall, when they entered it, was brightly lighted up; the fire was built high; and about the hearth the whole of the servants, men and women, stood huddled together like a flock of sheep. At the sight of Mr Utterson, the housemaid broke into hysterical whimpering; and the cook, crying out 'Bless God! it's Mr Utterson,' ran forward as if to take him in her arms.

'What, what? Are you all here?' said the lawyer peevishly. 'Very irregular, very unseemly; your master would be far from pleased.'

'They're all afraid,' said Poole.

Blank silence followed, no one protesting; only the maid lifted her voice and now wept loudly.

'Hold your tongue!' Poole said to her, with a ferocity of accent that testified to his own jangled nerves; and indeed, when the girl had so suddenly raised the note of her lamentation, they had all started and turned

towards the inner door with faces of dreadful expectation. ‘And now,’ continued the butler, addressing the knife-boy, ‘reach me a candle, and we’ll get this through hands at once.’ And then he begged Mr Utterson to follow him, and led the way to the back garden.

‘Now, sir,’ said he, ‘you come as gently as you can. I want you to hear, and I don’t want you to be heard. And see here, sir, if by any chance he was to ask you in, don’t go.’

Mr Utterson’s nerves, at this unlooked-for termination, gave a jerk that nearly threw him from his balance; but he recollected his courage and followed the butler into the laboratory building through the surgical theatre, with its lumber of crates and bottles, to the foot of the stair. Here Poole motioned him to stand on one side and listen; while he himself, setting down the candle and making a great and obvious call on his resolution, mounted the steps and knocked with a somewhat uncertain hand on the red baize of the cabinet door.

‘Mr Utterson, sir, asking to see you,’ he called; and even as he did so, once more violently signed to the lawyer to give ear.

A voice answered from within: ‘Tell him I cannot see anyone,’ it said complainingly.

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Poole, with a note of something like triumph in his voice; and taking up his candle, he led Mr Utterson back across the yard and into the great kitchen, where the fire was out and the beetles were leaping on the floor.

‘Sir,’ he said, looking Mr Utterson in the eyes, ‘was that my master’s voice?’

‘It seems much changed,’ replied the lawyer, very pale, but giving look for look.

‘Changed? Well, yes, I think so,’ said the butler. ‘Have I been twenty years in this man’s house, to be deceived about his voice? No, sir; master’s made away with; he was made away with eight days ago, when we heard him cry out upon the name of God; and *who’s* in there instead of him, and *why* it stays there, is a thing that cries to Heaven, Mr Utterson!’

‘This is a very strange tale, Poole; this is rather a wild tale, my man,’ said Mr Utterson, biting his finger. ‘Suppose it were as you suppose, supposing Dr Jekyll to have been – well, murdered, what could induce the murderer to stay? That won’t hold water; it doesn’t commend itself to reason.’

‘Well, Mr Utterson, you are a hard man to satisfy, but I’ll do it yet,’ said Poole. ‘All this last week (you must know) him, or it, whatever it is that lives in that cabinet, has been crying night and day for some sort of medicine and cannot get it to his mind. It was sometimes his way – the master’s, that is – to write his orders on a sheet of paper and throw it on the stair. We’ve had nothing else this week back; nothing but papers, and a closed door, and the very meals left there to be smuggled in when nobody was looking. Well, sir, every day, ay, and twice and thrice in the same day, there have been orders and complaints, and I have been sent flying to all the wholesale chemists in town. Every time I brought the stuff back, there would be another paper telling me to return it, because it was not pure, and another order to a different firm. This drug is wanted bitter bad, sir, whatever for.’

‘Have you any of these papers?’ asked Mr Utterson.

Poole felt in his pocket and handed out a crumpled note, which the lawyer, bending nearer to the candle, carefully examined. Its contents ran thus: ‘Dr Jekyll presents his compliments to Messrs. Maw. He assures them that their last sample is impure and quite useless for his present purpose. In the year 18—,Dr J. purchased a somewhat large quantity from Messrs. M. He now begs them to search with most sedulous care, and should any of the same quality be left, to forward it to him at once. Expense is no consideration. The importance of this to Dr J. can hardly be exaggerated.’ So far the letter had run composedly enough, but here with a sudden splutter of the pen, the writer’s emotion had broken loose. ‘For God’s sake,’ he added, ‘find me some of the old.’

‘This is a strange note,’ said Mr Utterson; and then sharply, ‘How do you come to have it open?’

‘The man at Maw’s was main angry, sir, and he threw it back to me like so much dirt,’ returned Poole.

‘This is unquestionably the doctor’s hand, do you know?’ resumed the lawyer.

‘I thought it looked like it,’ said the servant rather sulkily; and then, with another voice, ‘But what matters hand of write?’ he said. ‘I’ve seen him!’

‘Seen him?’ repeated Mr Utterson. ‘Well?’

‘That’s it!’ said Poole. ‘It was this way. I came suddenly into the theatre from the garden. It seems he had slipped out to look for this drug or

whatever it is; for the cabinet door was open, and there he was at the far end of the room digging among the crates. He looked up when I came in, gave a kind of cry, and whipped upstairs into the cabinet. It was but for one minute that I saw him, but the hair stood upon my head like quills. Sir, if that was my master, why had he a mask upon his face? If it was my master, why did he cry out like a rat, and run from me? I have served him long enough. And then … The man paused and passed his hand over his face.

'These are all very strange circumstances,' said Mr Utterson, 'but I think I begin to see daylight. Your master, Poole, is plainly seized with one of those maladies that both torture and deform the sufferer; hence, for aught I know, the alteration of his voice; hence the mask and the avoidance of his friends; hence his eagerness to find this drug, by means of which the poor soul retains some hope of ultimate recovery— God grant that he be not deceived! There is my explanation; it is sad enough, Poole, ay, and appalling to consider; but it is plain and natural, hangs well together, and delivers us from all exorbitant alarms.'

'Sir,' said the butler, turning to a sort of mottled pallor, 'that thing was not my master, and there's the truth. My master' – here he looked round him and began to whisper – 'is a tall, fine build of a man, and this was more of a dwarf.' Utterson attempted to protest. 'O, sir,' cried Poole, 'do you think I do not know my master after twenty years? Do you think I do not know where his head comes to in the cabinet door, where I saw him every morning of my life? No, sir, that thing in the mask was never Dr Jekyll— God knows what it was, but it was never Dr Jekyll; and it is the belief of my heart that there was murder done.'

'Poole,' replied the lawyer, 'if you say that, it will become my duty to make certain. Much as I desire to spare your master's feelings, much as I am puzzled by this note which seems to prove him to be still alive, I shall consider it my duty to break in that door.'

'Ah, Mr Utterson, that's talking!' cried the butler.

'And now comes the second question,' resumed Utterson: 'Who is going to do it?'

'Why, you and me, sir,' was the undaunted reply.

'That's very well said,' returned the lawyer; 'and whatever comes of it, I shall make it my business to see you are no loser.'

‘There is an axe in the theatre,’ continued Poole; ‘and you might take the kitchen poker for yourself.’

The lawyer took that rude but weighty instrument into his hand, and balanced it. ‘Do you know, Poole,’ he said, looking up, ‘that you and I are about to place ourselves in a position of some peril?’

‘You may say so, sir, indeed,’ returned the butler.

‘It is well, then, that we should be frank,’ said the other. ‘We both think more than we have said; let us make a clean breast. This masked figure that you saw, did you recognise it?’

‘Well, sir, it went so quick, and the creature was so doubled up, that I could hardly swear to that,’ was the answer. ‘But if you mean, was it Mr Hyde? – Why, yes, I think it was! You see, it was much of the same bigness; and it had the same quick, light way with it; and then who else could have got in by the laboratory door? You have not forgot, sir, that at the time of the murder he had still the key with him? But that’s not all. I don’t know, Mr Utterson, if you ever met this Mr Hyde?’

‘Yes,’ said the lawyer, ‘I once spoke with him.’

‘Then you must know as well as the rest of us that there was something queer about that gentleman – something that gave a man a turn – I don’t know rightly how to say it, sir, beyond this: that you felt in your marrow kind of cold and thin.’

‘I own I felt something of what you describe,’ said Mr Utterson.

‘Quite so, sir,’ returned Poole. ‘Well, when that masked thing like a monkey jumped from among the chemicals and whipped into the cabinet, it went down my spine like ice. O, I know it’s not evidence, Mr Utterson; I’m book-learned enough for that; but a man has his feelings, and I give you my bible-word it was Mr Hyde!’

‘Ay, ay,’ said the lawyer. ‘My fears incline to the same point. Evil, I fear, founded – evil was sure to come – of that connection. Ay truly, I believe you; I believe poor Harry is killed; and I believe his murderer (for what purpose, God alone can tell) is still lurking in his victim’s room. Well, let our name be vengeance. Call Bradshaw.’

The footman came at the summons, very white and nervous.

‘Put yourself together, Bradshaw,’ said the lawyer. ‘This suspense, I know, is telling upon all of you; but it is now our intention to make an end of it. Poole, here, and I are going to force our way into the cabinet. If all is

well, my shoulders are broad enough to bear the blame. Meanwhile, lest anything should really be amiss, or any malefactor seek to escape by the back, you and the boy must go round the corner with a pair of good sticks and take your post at the laboratory door. We give you ten minutes, to get to your stations.'

As Bradshaw left, the lawyer looked at his watch. 'And now, Poole, let us get to ours,' he said; and taking the poker under his arm, led the way into the yard. The scud had banked over the moon, and it was now quite dark. The wind, which only broke in puffs and draughts into that deep well of building, tossed the light of the candle to and fro about their steps, until they came into the shelter of the theatre, where they sat down silently to wait. London hummed solemnly all around; but nearer at hand, the stillness was only broken by the sounds of a football moving to and fro along the cabinet floor.

'So it will walk all day, sir,' whispered Poole; 'ay, and the better part of the night. Only when a new sample comes from the chemist, there's a bit of a break. Ah, it's an ill conscience that's such an enemy to rest! Ah, sir, there's blood foully shed in every step of it! But hark again, a little closer – put your heart in your ears, Mr Utterson, and tell me, is that the doctor's foot?'

The steps fell lightly and oddly, with a certain swing, for all they went so slowly; it was different indeed from the heavy creaking tread of Henry Jekyll. Utterson sighed. 'Is there never anything else?' he asked.

Poole nodded. 'Once,' he said. 'Once I heard it weeping!'

'Weeping? how that?' said the lawyer, conscious of a sudden chill of horror.

'Weeping like a woman or a lost soul,' said the butler. 'I came away with that upon my heart, that I could have wept too.'

But now the ten minutes drew to an end. Poole disinterred the axe from under a stack of packing straw; the candle was set upon the nearest table to light them to the attack; and they drew near with bated breath to where that patient foot was still going up and down, up and down, in the quiet of the night. 'Jekyll,' cried Utterson, with a loud voice, 'I demand to see you.' He paused a moment, but there came no reply. 'I give you fair warning, our suspicions are aroused, and I must and shall see you,' he resumed; 'if not by fair means, then by foul – if not of your consent, then by brute force!'

‘Utterson,’ said the voice, ‘for God’s sake, have mercy!’

‘Ah, that’s not Jekyll’s voice – it’s Hyde’s!’ cried Utterson. ‘Down with the door, Poole!’

Poole swung the axe over his shoulder; the blow shook the building, and the red baize door leaped against the lock and hinges. A dismal screech, as of mere animal terror, rang from the cabinet. Up went the axe again, and again the panels crashed and the frame bounded; four times the blow fell; but the wood was tough and the fittings were of excellent workmanship; and it was not until the fifth, that the lock burst and the wreck of the door fell inwards on the carpet.

The besiegers, appalled by their own riot and the stillness that had succeeded, stood back a little and peered in. There lay the cabinet before their eyes in the quiet lamplight, a good fire glowing and chattering on the hearth, the kettle singing its thin strain, a drawer or two open, papers neatly set forth on the business table, and nearer the fire, the things laid out for tea; the quietest room, you would have said, and, but for the glazed presses full of chemicals, the most commonplace that night in London.

Right in the midst there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching. They drew near on tiptoe, turned it on its back and beheld the face of Edward Hyde. He was dressed in clothes far too large for him, clothes of the doctor’s bigness; the cords of his face still moved with a semblance of life, but life was quite gone: and by the crushed phial in the hand and the strong smell of kernels that hung upon the air, Utterson knew that he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer.

‘We have come too late,’ he said sternly, ‘whether to save or punish. Hyde is gone to his account; and it only remains for us to find the body of your master.’

The far greater proportion of the building was occupied by the theatre, which filled almost the whole ground storey and was lighted from above, and by the cabinet, which formed an upper storey at one end and looked upon the court. A corridor joined the theatre to the door on the by-street; and with this the cabinet communicated separately by a second flight of stairs. There were besides a few dark closets and a spacious cellar. All these they now thoroughly examined. Each closet needed but a glance, for all were empty, and all, by the dust that fell from their doors, had stood long unopened. The cellar, indeed, was filled with crazy lumber, mostly dating

from the times of the surgeon who was Jekyll's predecessor; but even as they opened the door they were advertised of the uselessness of further search, by the fall of a perfect mat of cobweb which had for years sealed up the entrance. Nowhere was there any trace of Henry Jekyll, dead or alive.

Poole stamped on the flags of the corridor. 'He must be buried here,' he said, hearkening to the sound.

'Or he may have fled,' said Utterson, and he turned to examine the door in the by-street. It was locked; and lying near by on the flags, they found the key, already stained with rust.

'This does not look like use,' observed the lawyer.

'Use!' echoed Poole. 'Do you not see, sir, it is broken? much as if a man had stamped on it.'

'Ay,' continued Utterson, 'and the fractures, too, are rusty.' The two men looked at each other with a scare. 'This is beyond me, Poole,' said the lawyer. 'Let us go back to the cabinet.'

They mounted the stair in silence, and still with an occasional awestruck glance at the dead body, proceeded more thoroughly to examine the contents of the cabinet. At one table, there were traces of chemical work, various measured heaps of some white salt being laid on glass saucers, as though for an experiment in which the unhappy man had been prevented.

'That is the same drug that I was always bringing him,' said Poole; and even as he spoke, the kettle with a startling noise boiled over.

This brought them to the fireside, where the easychair was drawn cosily up, and the tea things stood ready to the sitter's elbow, the very sugar in the cup. There were several books on a shelf; one lay beside the tea things open, and Utterson was amazed to find it a copy of a pious work, for which Jekyll had several times expressed a great esteem, annotated, in his own hand, with startling blasphemies.

Next, in the course of their review of the chamber, the searchers came to the cheval-glass, into whose depths they looked with an involuntary horror. But it was so turned as to show them nothing but the rosy glow playing on the roof, the fire sparkling in a hundred repetitions along the glazed front of the presses, and their own pale and fearful countenances stooping to look in.

'This glass has seen some strange things, sir,' whispered Poole.

‘And surely none stranger than itself,’ echoed the lawyer in the same tones. ‘For what did Jekyll’ – he caught himself up at the word with a start, and then conquering the weakness – ‘what could Jekyll want with it?’ he said.

‘You may say that!’ said Poole.

Next they turned to the business table. On the desk, among the neat array of papers, a large envelope was uppermost, and bore, in the doctor’s hand, the name of Mr Utterson. The lawyer unsealed it, and several enclosures fell to the floor. The first was a will, drawn in the same eccentric terms as the one which he had returned six months before, to serve as a testament in case of death and as a deed of gift in case of disappearance; but in place of the name of Edward Hyde, the lawyer, with indescribable amazement, read the name of Gabriel John Utterson. He looked at Poole, and then back at the paper, and last of all at the dead malefactor stretched upon the carpet.

‘My head goes round,’ he said. ‘He has been all these days in possession; he had no cause to like me; he must have raged to see himself displaced; and he has not destroyed this document.’

He caught up the next paper; it was a brief note in the doctor’s hand and dated at the top. ‘O Poole!’ the lawyer cried, ‘he was alive and here this day. He cannot have been disposed of in so short a space; he must be still alive, he must have fled! And then, why fled? and how? and in that case, can we venture to declare this suicide? O, we must be careful. I foresee that we may yet involve your master in some dire catastrophe.’

‘Why don’t you read it, sir?’ asked Poole.

‘Because I fear,’ replied the lawyer solemnly. ‘God grant I have no cause for it!’ And with that he brought the paper to his eyes and read as follows:

> My dear Utterson,— When this shall fall into your hands, I shall have disappeared, under what circumstances I have not the penetration to foresee, but my instinct and all the circumstances of my nameless situation tell me that the end is sure and must be early. Go then, and first read the narrative which Lanyon warned me he was to place in your hands; and if you care to hear more, turn to the confession of
>
> ‘Your unworthy and unhappy friend,
>
> HENRY JEKYLL.

‘There was a third enclosure?’ asked Utterson.

‘Here, sir,’ said Poole, and gave into his hands a considerable packet sealed in several places.

The lawyer put it in his pocket. ‘I would say nothing of this paper. If your master has fled or is dead, we may at least save his credit. It is now ten; I must go home and read these documents in quiet; but I shall be back before midnight, when we shall send for the police.’

They went out, locking the door of the theatre behind them; and Utterson, once more leaving the servants gathered about the fire in the hall, trudged back to his office to read the two narratives in which this mystery was now to be explained.

Dr Lanyon's Narrative

On the ninth of January, now four days ago, I received by the evening delivery a registered envelope, addressed in the hand of my colleague and old school companion, Henry Jekyll. I was a good deal surprised by this; for we were by no means in the habit of correspondence; I had seen the man, dined with him, indeed, the night before; and I could imagine nothing in our intercourse that should justify formality of registration. The contents increased my wonder; for this is how the letter ran:

10th December, 18 —.

Dear Lanyon,— You are one of my oldest friends; and although we may have differed at times on scientific questions, I cannot remember, at least on my side, any break in our affection. There was never a day when, if you had said to me, "Jekyll, my life, my honour, my reason, depend upon you," I would not have sacrificed my left hand to help you. Lanyon, my life, my honour, my reason, are all at your mercy; if you fail me to-night, I am lost. You might suppose, after this preface, that I am going to ask you for something dishonourable to grant. Judge for yourself.

I want you to postpone all other engagements for to-night – ay, even if you were summoned to the bedside of an emperor; to take a cab, unless your carriage should be actually at the door; and with this letter in your hand for consultation, to drive straight to my house. Poole, my butler, has his orders; you will find him waiting your arrival with a locksmith. The door of my cabinet is then to be forced: and you are to go in alone; to open the glazed press (letter E) on the left hand, breaking the lock if it be shut; and to draw out, *with all its contents as they stand*, the fourth drawer from the top or (which is the same thing) the third from the bottom. In my extreme distress of mind, I have a morbid fear of misdirecting you; but even if I am in error, you may know the right drawer by its contents: some powders, a phial and a paper book. This drawer I beg of you to carry back with you to Cavendish Square exactly as it stands.

That is the first part of the service: now for the second. You should be back, if you set out at once on the receipt of this, long before midnight; but I will leave you that amount of margin, not only in the fear of one of those obstacles that can neither be prevented nor foreseen, but because an hour when your servants are in bed is to be preferred for what will then remain to do. At midnight, then, I have to ask you to be alone in your consulting room, to admit with your own hand into the house a man who will present himself in my name, and to place in his hands the drawer that you will have brought with you from my cabinet. Then you will have played your part and earned my gratitude completely. Five minutes afterwards, if you insist upon an explanation, you will have understood that these

arrangements are of capital importance; and that by the neglect of one of them, fantastic as they must appear, you might have charged your conscience with my death or the shipwreck of my reason.

Confident as I am that you will not trifle with this appeal, my heart sinks and my hand trembles at the bare thought of such a possibility. Think of me at this hour, in a strange place, labouring under a blackness of distress that no fancy can exaggerate, and yet well aware that, if you will but punctually serve me, my troubles will roll away like a story that is told. Serve me, my dear Lanyon, and save

Your friend,
H.J.

P.S.— I had already sealed this up when a fresh terror struck upon my soul. It is possible that the post-office may fail me, and this letter not come into your hands until to-morrow morning. In that case, dear Lanyon, do my errand when it shall be most convenient for you in the course of the day; and once more expect my messenger at midnight. It may then already be too late; and if that night passes without event, you will know that you have seen the last of Henry Jekyll.'

Upon the reading of this letter, I made sure my colleague was insane; but till that was proved beyond the possibility of doubt, I felt bound to do as he requested. The less I understood of this farrago, the less I was in a position to judge of its importance; and an appeal so worded could not be set aside without a grave responsibility. I rose accordingly from table, got into a hansom, and drove straight to Jekyll's house. The butler was awaiting my arrival; he had received by the same post as mine a registered letter of instruction, and had sent at once for a locksmith and a carpenter. The tradesmen came while we were yet speaking; and we moved in a body to old Dr Denman's surgical theatre, from which (as you are doubtless aware) Jekyll's private cabinet is most conveniently entered. The door was very strong, the lock excellent; the carpenter avowed he would have great trouble and have to do much damage, if force were to be used; and the locksmith was near despair. But this last was a handy fellow, and after two hours' work, the door stood open. The press marked E was unlocked; and I took out the drawer, had it filled up with straw and tied in a sheet, and returned with it to Cavendish Square.

Here I proceeded to examine its contents. The powders were neatly enough made up, but not with the nicety of the dispensing chemist; so that it was plain they were of Jekyll's private manufacture: and when I opened one of the wrappers I found what seemed to me a simple crystalline salt of a white colour. The phial, to which I next turned my attention, might have

been about half full of a blood-red liquor, which was highly pungent to the sense of smell and seemed to me to contain phosphorus and some volatile ether. At the other ingredients I could make no guess. The book was an ordinary version book and contained little but a series of dates. These covered a period of many years, but I observed that the entries ceased nearly a year ago and quite abruptly. Here and there a brief remark was appended to a date, usually no more than a single word: ‘double’ occurring perhaps six times in a total of several hundred entries; and once very early in the list and followed by several marks of exclamation, ‘total failure!!!’ All this, though it whetted my curiosity, told me little that was definite. Here were a phial of some salt, and the record of a series of experiments that had led (like too many of Jekyll’s investigations) to no end of practical usefulness. How could the presence of these articles in my house affect either the honour, the sanity, or the life of my flighty colleague? If his messenger could go to one place, why could he not go to another? And even granting some impediment, why was this gentleman to be received by me in secret? The more I reflected the more convinced I grew that I was dealing with a case of cerebral disease; and though I dismissed my servants to bed, I loaded an old revolver, that I might be found in some posture of self-defence.

Twelve o’clock had scarce rung out over London, ere the knocker sounded very gently on the door. I went myself at the summons, and found a small man crouching against the pillars of the portico.

‘Are you come from Dr Jekyll?’ I asked.

He told me ‘yes’ by a constrained gesture; and when I had bidden him enter, he did not obey me without a searching backward glance into the darkness of the square. There was a policeman not far off, advancing with his bull’s eye open; and at the sight, I thought my visitor started and made greater haste.

These particulars struck me, I confess, disagreeably; and as I followed him into the bright light of the consulting room, I kept my hand ready on my weapon. Here, at last, I had a chance of clearly seeing him. I had never set eyes on him before, so much was certain. He was small, as I have said; I was struck besides with the shocking expression of his face, with his remarkable combination of great muscular activity and great apparent debility of constitution, and – last but not least – with the odd, subjective

disturbance caused by his neighbourhood. This bore some resemblance to incipient rigour, and was accompanied by a marked sinking of the pulse. At the time, I set it down to some idiosyncratic, personal distaste, and merely wondered at the acuteness of the symptoms; but I have since had reason to believe the cause to lie much deeper in the nature of man, and to turn on some nobler hinge than the principle of hatred.

This person (who had thus, from the first moment of his entrance, struck in me what I can only describe as a disgustful curiosity) was dressed in a fashion that would have made an ordinary person laughable; his clothes, that is to say, although they were of rich and sober fabric, were enormously too large for him in every measurement – the trousers hanging on his legs and rolled up to keep them from the ground, the waist of the coat below his haunches, and the collar sprawling wide upon his shoulders. Strange to relate, this ludicrous accoutrement was far from moving me to laughter. Rather, as there was something abnormal and misbegotten in the very essence of the creature that now faced me – something seizing, surprising and revolting – this fresh disparity seemed but to fit in with and to reinforce it; so that to my interest in the man's nature and character, there was added a curiosity as to his origin, his life, his fortune and status in the world.

These observations, though they have taken so great a space to be set down in, were yet the work of a few seconds. My visitor was, indeed, on fire with sombre excitement.

'Have you got it?' he cried. 'Have you got it?' And so lively was his impatience that he even laid his hand upon my arm and sought to shake me.

I put him back, conscious at his touch of a certain icy pang along my blood. 'Come, sir,' said I. 'You forget that I have not yet the pleasure of your acquaintance. Be seated, if you please.' And I showed him an example, and sat down myself in my customary seat and with as fair an imitation of my ordinary manner to a patient, as the lateness of the hour, the nature of my preoccupations, and the horror I had of my visitor, would suffer me to muster.

'I beg your pardon, Dr Lanyon,' he replied civilly enough. 'What you say is very well founded; and my impatience has shown its heels to my politeness. I come here at the instance of your colleague, Dr Henry Jekyll, on a piece of business of some moment; and I understood …' He paused and put his hand to his throat, and I could see, in spite of his collected

manner, that he was wrestling against the approaches of the hysteria – ‘I understood, a drawer …’

But here I took pity on my visitor’s suspense, and some perhaps on my own growing curiosity.

‘There it is, sir,’ said I, pointing to the drawer, where it lay on the floor behind a table and still covered with the sheet.

He sprang to it, and then paused, and laid his hand upon his heart: I could hear his teeth grate with the convulsive action of his jaws; and his face was so ghastly to see that I grew alarmed both for his life and reason.

‘Compose yourself,’ said I.

He turned a dreadful smile to me, and as if with the decision of despair, plucked away the sheet. At sight of the contents, he uttered one loud sob of such immense relief that I sat petrified. And the next moment, in a voice that was already fairly well under control, ‘Have you a graduated glass?’ he asked.

I rose from my place with something of an effort and gave him what he asked.

He thanked me with a smiling nod, measured out a few minims of the red tincture and added one of the powders. The mixture, which was at first of a reddish hue, began, in proportion as the crystals melted, to brighten in colour, to effervesce audibly, and to throw off small fumes of vapour. Suddenly and at the same moment, the ebullition ceased and the compound changed to a dark purple, which faded again more slowly to a watery green. My visitor, who had watched these metamorphoses with a keen eye, smiled, set down the glass upon the table, and then turned and looked upon me with an air of scrutiny.

‘And now,’ said he, ‘to settle what remains. Will you be wise? Will you be guided? Will you suffer me to take this glass in my hand and to go forth from your house without further parley? Or has the greed of curiosity too much command of you? Think before you answer, for it shall be done as you decide. As you decide, you shall be left as you were before, and neither richer nor wiser, unless the sense of service rendered to a man in mortal distress may be counted as a kind of riches of the soul. Or, if you shall so prefer to choose, a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power shall be laid open to you, here, in this room, upon the instant;

and your sight shall be blasted by a prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan.'

'Sir,' said I, affecting a coolness that I was far from truly possessing, 'you speak enigmas, and you will perhaps not wonder that I hear you with no very strong impression of belief. But I have gone too far in the way of inexplicable services to pause before I see the end.'

'It is well,' replied my visitor. 'Lanyon, you remember your vows: what follows is under the seal of our profession. And now, you who have so long been bound to the most narrow and material views, you who have denied the virtue of transcendental medicine, you who have derided your superiors – behold!'

He put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp. A cry followed; he reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on, staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth; and as I looked there came, I thought, a change – he seemed to swell – his face became suddenly black and the features seemed to melt and alter – and the next moment, I had sprung to my feet and leaped back against the wall, my arm raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror.

'O God!' I screamed, and 'O God!' again and again; for there before my eyes – pale and shaken, and half fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death – there stood Henry Jekyll!

What he told me in the next hour, I cannot bring my mind to set on paper. I saw what I saw, I heard what I heard, and my soul sickened at it; and yet now when that sight has faded from my eyes, I ask myself if I believe it, and I cannot answer. My life is shaken to its roots; sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours of the day and night; and I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous. As for the moral turpitude that man unveiled to me, even with tears of penitence, I cannot, even in memory, dwell on it without a start of horror. I will say but one thing, Utterson, and that (if you can bring your mind to credit it) will be more than enough. The creature who crept into my house that night was, on Jekyll's own confession, known by the name of Hyde and hunted for in every corner of the land as the murderer of Carew.

Hastie Lanyon

Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case

I was born in the year 18— to a large fortune, endowed besides with excellent parts, inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellowmen, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future. And indeed the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life. Many a man would have even blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of; but from the high views that I had set before me, I regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame. It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults, that made me what I was, and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature. In this case, I was driven to reflect deeply and inveterately on that hard law of life, which lies at the root of religion and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress. Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering. And it chanced that the direction of my scientific studies, which led wholly towards the mystic and the transcendental, reacted and shed a strong light on this consciousness of the perennial war among my members. With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I

thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens. I, for my part, from the nature of my life, advanced infallibly in one direction and in one direction only. It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both; and from an early date, even before the course of my scientific discoveries had begun to suggest the most naked possibility of such a miracle, I had learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved daydream, on the thought of the separation of these elements. If each, I told myself, could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil. It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together – that in the agonised womb of consciousness, these polar twins should be continuously struggling. How, then, were they dissociated?

I was so far in my reflections when, as I have said, a side light began to shine upon the subject from the laboratory table. I began to perceive more deeply than it has ever yet been stated, the trembling immateriality, the mistlike transience, of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired. Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and pluck back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion. For two good reasons, I will not enter deeply into this scientific branch of my confession. First, because I have been made to learn that the doom and burthen of our life is bound for ever on man’s shoulders, and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure. Second, because, as my narrative will make, alas! too evident, my discoveries were incomplete. Enough then, that I not only recognised my natural body from the mere aura and effulgence of certain of

the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me because they were the expression, and bore the stamp of lower elements in my soul.

I hesitated long before I put this theory to the test of practice. I knew well that I risked death; for any drug that so potently controlled and shook the very fortress of identity, might, by the least scruple of an overdose or at the least inopportunity in the moment of exhibition, utterly blot out that immaterial tabernacle which I looked to it to change. But the temptation of a discovery so singular and profound at last overcame the suggestions of alarm. I had long since prepared my tincture; I purchased at once, from a firm of wholesale chemists, a large quantity of a particular salt which I knew, from my experiments, to be the last ingredient required; and late one accursed night, I compounded the elements, watched them boil and smoke together in the glass, and when the ebullition had subsided, with a strong glow of courage, drank off the potion.

The most racking pangs succeeded: a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death. Then these agonies began swiftly to subside, and I came to myself as if out of a great sickness. There was something strange in my sensations, something indescribably new and, from its very novelty, incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a millrace in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul. I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil; and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine. I stretched out my hands, exulting in the freshness of these sensations; and in the act, I was suddenly aware that I had lost in stature.

There was no mirror, at that date, in my room; that which stands beside me as I write, was brought there later on and for the very purpose of these transformations. The night, however, was far gone into the morning – the morning, black as it was, was nearly ripe for the conception of the day – the inmates of my house were locked in the most rigorous hours of slumber;

and I determined, flushed as I was with hope and triumph, to venture in my new shape as far as to my bedroom. I crossed the yard, wherein the constellations looked down upon me, I could have thought, with wonder, the first creature of that sort that their unsleeping vigilance had yet disclosed to them; I stole through the corridors, a stranger in my own house; and coming to my room, I saw for the first time the appearance of Edward Hyde.

I must here speak by theory alone, saying not that which I know, but that which I suppose to be most probable. The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stamping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed. Again, in the course of my life, which had been, after all, nine tenths a life of effort, virtue and control, it had been much less exercised and much less exhausted. And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human. In my eyes it bore a livelier image of the spirit, it seemed more express and single, than the imperfect and divided countenance I had been hitherto accustomed to call mine. And in so far I was doubtless right. I have observed that when I wore the semblance of Edward Hyde, none could come near to me at first without a visible misgiving of the flesh. This, as I take it, was because all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil.

I lingered but a moment at the mirror: the second and conclusive experiment had yet to be attempted; it yet remained to be seen if I had lost my identity beyond redemption and must flee before daylight from a house that was no longer mine; and hurrying back to my cabinet, I once more prepared and drank the cup, once more suffered the pangs of dissolution, and came to myself once more with the character, the stature and the face of Henry Jekyll.

That night I had come to the fatal cross-roads. Had I approached my discovery in a more noble spirit, had I risked the experiment while under the empire of generous or pious aspirations, all must have been otherwise, and from these agonies of death and birth, I had come forth an angel instead of a fiend. The drug had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine; it but shook the doors of the prison-house of my disposition; and like the captives of Philippi, that which stood within ran forth. At that time my virtue slumbered; my evil, kept awake by ambition, was alert and swift to seize the occasion; and the thing that was projected was Edward Hyde. Hence, although I had now two characters as well as two appearances, one was wholly evil, and the other was still the old Henry Jekyll, that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair. The movement was thus wholly toward the worse.

Even at that time, I had not conquered my aversions to the dryness of a life of study. I would still be merrily disposed at times; and as my pleasures were (to say the least) undignified, and I was not only well known and highly considered, but growing towards the elderly man, this incoherency of my life was daily growing more unwelcome. It was on this side that my new power tempted me until I fell in slavery. I had but to drink the cup, to doff at once the body of the noted professor, and to assume, like a thick cloak, that of Edward Hyde. I smiled at the notion; it seemed to me at the time to be humourous; and I made my preparations with the most studious care. I took and furnished that house in Soho, to which Hyde was tracked by the police; and engaged as a housekeeper a creature whom I knew well to be silent and unscrupulous. On the other side, I announced to my servants that a Mr Hyde (whom I described) was to have full liberty and power about my house in the square; and to parry mishaps, I even called and made myself a familiar object, in my second character. I next drew up that will to which you so much objected; so that if anything befell me in the person of Dr Jekyll, I could enter on that of Edward Hyde without pecuniary loss. And thus fortified, as I supposed, on every side, I began to profit by the strange immunities of my position.

Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first that could plod in the public eye with a load of

genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete. Think of it – I did not even exist! Let me but escape into my laboratory door, give me but a second or two to mix and swallow the draught that I had always standing ready; and whatever he had done, Edward Hyde would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror; and there in his stead, quietly at home, trimming the midnight lamp in his study, a man who could afford to laugh at suspicion, would be Henry Jekyll.

The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde, they soon began to turn toward the monstrous. When I would come back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity. This familiar that I called out of my own soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasure, was a being inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centered on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone. Henry Jekyll stood at times aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty. Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired; he would even make haste, where it was possible, to undo the evil done by Hyde. And thus his conscience slumbered.

Into the details of the infamy at which I thus connived (for even now I can scarce grant that I committed it) I have no design of entering; I mean but to point out the warnings and the successive steps with which my chastisement approached. I met with one accident which, as it brought on no consequence, I shall no more than mention. An act of cruelty to a child aroused against me the anger of a passer-by, whom I recognised the other day in the person of your kinsman; the doctor and the child's family joined him; there were moments when I feared for my life; and at last, in order to pacify their too just resentment, Edward Hyde had to bring them to the door, and pay them in a cheque drawn in the name of Henry Jekyll. But this danger was easily eliminated from the future, by opening an account at another bank in the name of Edward Hyde himself; and when, by sloping

my own hand backward, I had supplied my double with a signature, I thought I sat beyond the reach of fate.

Some two months before the murder of Sir Danvers, I had been out for one of my adventures, had returned at a late hour, and woke the next day in bed with somewhat odd sensations. It was in vain I looked about me; in vain I saw the decent furniture and tall proportions of my room in the square; in vain that I recognised the pattern of the bed curtains and the design of the mahogany frame; something still kept insisting that I was not where I was, that I had not wakened where I seemed to be, but in the little room in Soho where I was accustomed to sleep in the body of Edward Hyde. I smiled to myself, and, in my psychological way, began lazily to inquire into the elements of this illusion, occasionally, even as I did so, dropping back into a comfortable morning doze. I was still so engaged when, in one of my more wakeful moments, my eyes fell upon my hand. Now the hand of Henry Jekyll (as you have often remarked) was professional in shape and size: it was large, firm, white and comely. But the hand which I now saw, clearly enough, in the yellow light of a mid-London morning, lying half shut on the bedclothes, was lean, corded, knuckly, of a dusky pallor and thickly shaded with a swart growth of hair. It was the hand of Edward Hyde.

I must have stared upon it for near half a minute, sunk as I was in the mere stupidity of wonder, before terror woke up in my breast as sudden and startling as the crash of cymbals; and bounding from my bed, I rushed to the mirror. At the sight that met my eyes, my blood was changed into something exquisitely thin and icy. Yes, I had gone to bed Henry Jekyll, I had awakened Edward Hyde. How was this to be explained? I asked myself; and then, with another bound of terror – how was it to be remedied? It was well on in the morning; the servants were up; all my drugs were in the cabinet – a long journey down two pairs of stairs, through the back passage, across the open court and through the anatomical theatre, from where I was then standing horror-struck. It might indeed be possible to cover my face; but of what use was that, when I was unable to conceal the alteration in my stature? And then with an overpowering sweetness of relief, it came back upon my mind that the servants were already used to the coming and going of my second self. I had soon dressed, as well as I was able, in clothes of my own size: had soon passed through the house, where

Bradshaw stared and drew back at seeing Mr Hyde at such an hour and in such a strange array; and ten minutes later, Dr Jekyll had returned to his own shape and was sitting down, with a darkened brow, to make a feint of breakfasting.

Small indeed was my appetite. This inexplicable incident, this reversal of my previous experience, seemed, like the Babylonian finger on the wall, to be spelling out the letters of my judgment; and I began to reflect more seriously than ever before on the issues and possibilities of my double existence. That part of me which I had the power of projecting, had lately been much exercised and nourished; it had seemed to me of late as though the body of Edward Hyde had grown in stature, as though (when I wore that form) I were conscious of a more generous tide of blood; and I began to spy a danger that, if this were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown, the power of voluntary change be forfeited, and the character of Edward Hyde become irrevocably mine. The power of the drug had not been always equally displayed. Once, very early in my career, it had totally failed me; since then I had been obliged on more than one occasion to double, and once, with infinite risk of death, to treble the amount; and these rare uncertainties had cast hitherto the sole shadow on my contentment. Now, however, and in the light of that morning's accident, I was led to remark that whereas, in the beginning, the difficulty had been to throw off the body of Jekyll, it had of late gradually but decidedly transferred itself to the other side. All things therefore seemed to point to this; that I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse.

Between these two, I now felt I had to choose. My two natures had memory in common, but all other faculties were most unequally shared between them. Jekyll (who was composite) now with the most sensitive apprehensions, now with a greedy gusto, projected and shared in the pleasures and adventures of Hyde; but Hyde was indifferent to Jekyll, or but remembered him as the mountain bandit remembers the cavern in which he conceals himself from pursuit. Jekyll had more than a father's interest; Hyde had more than a son's indifference. To cast in my lot with Jekyll, was to die to those appetites which I had long secretly indulged and had of late begun to pamper. To cast it in with Hyde, was to die to a thousand interests and aspirations, and to become, at a blow and forever, despised and

friendless. The bargain might appear unequal; but there was still another consideration in the scales; for while Jekyll would suffer smartingly in the fires of abstinence, Hyde would be not even conscious of all that he had lost. Strange as my circumstances were, the terms of this debate are as old and commonplace as man; much the same inducements and alarms cast the die for any tempted and trembling sinner; and it fell out with me, as it falls with so vast a majority of my fellows, that I chose the better part and was found wanting in the strength to keep to it.

Yes, I preferred the elderly and discontented doctor, surrounded by friends and cherishing honest hopes; and bade a resolute farewell to the liberty, the comparative youth, the light step, leaping impulses and secret pleasures, that I had enjoyed in the disguise of Hyde. I made this choice perhaps with some unconscious reservation, for I neither gave up the house in Soho, nor destroyed the clothes of Edward Hyde, which still lay ready in my cabinet. For two months, however, I was true to my determination; for two months, I led a life of such severity as I had never before attained to, and enjoyed the compensations of an approving conscience. But time began at last to obliterate the freshness of my alarm; the praises of conscience began to grow into a thing of course; I began to be tortured with throes and longings, as of Hyde struggling after freedom; and at last, in an hour of moral weakness, I once again compounded and swallowed the transforming draught.

I do not suppose that, when a drunkard reasons with himself upon his vice, he is once out of five hundred times affected by the dangers that he runs through his brutish, physical insensibility; neither had I, long as I had considered my position, made enough allowance for the complete moral insensibility and insensate readiness to evil, which were the leading characters of Edward Hyde. Yet it was by these that I was punished. My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring. I was conscious, even when I took the draught, of a more unbridled, a more furious propensity to ill. It must have been this, I suppose, that stirred in my soul that tempest of impatience with which I listened to the civilities of my unhappy victim; I declare, at last, before God, no man morally sane could have been guilty of that crime upon so pitiful a provocation; and that I struck in no more reasonable spirit than that in which a sick child may break a plaything. But I had voluntarily stripped myself of all those balancing instincts by which

even the worst of us continues to walk with some degree of steadiness among temptations; and in my case, to be tempted, however slightly, was to fall.

Instantly the spirit of hell awoke in me and raged. With a transport of glee, I mauled the unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow; and it was not till weariness had begun to succeed, that I was suddenly, in the top fit of my delirium, struck through the heart by a cold thrill of terror. A mist dispersed; I saw my life to be forfeit; and fled from the scene of these excesses, at once glorying and trembling, my lust of evil gratified and stimulated, my love of life screwed to the topmost peg. I ran to the house in Soho, and (to make assurance doubly sure) destroyed my papers; thence I set out through the lamplit streets, in the same divided ecstasy of mind, gloating on my crime, light-headedly devising others in the future, and yet still hastening and still hearkening in my wake for the steps of the avenger. Hyde had a song upon his lips as he compounded the draught, and as he drank it, pledged the dead man. The pangs of transformation had not done tearing him, before Henry Jekyll, with streaming tears of gratitude and remorse, had fallen upon his knees and lifted his clasped hands to God. The veil of self-indulgence was rent from head to foot. I saw my life as a whole: I followed it up from the days of childhood, when I had walked with my father’s hand, and through the self-denying toils of my professional life, to arrive again and again, with the same sense of unreality, at the damned horrors of the evening. I could have screamed aloud; I sought with tears and prayers to smother down the crowd of hideous images and sounds with which my memory swarmed against me; and still, between the petitions, the ugly face of my iniquity stared into my soul. As the acuteness of this remorse began to die away, it was succeeded by a sense of joy. The problem of my conduct was solved. Hyde was thenceforth impossible; whether I would or not, I was now confined to the better part of my existence; and O, how I rejoiced to think of it! with what willing humility I embraced anew the restrictions of natural life! With what sincere renunciation I locked the door by which I had so often gone and come, and ground the key under my heel!

The next day, came the news that the murder had been overlooked, that the guilt of Hyde was patent to the world, and that the victim was a man high in public estimation. It was not only a crime, it had been a tragic folly.

I think I was glad to know it; I think I was glad to have my better impulses thus buttressed and guarded by the terrors of the scaffold. Jekyll was now my city of refuge; let but Hyde peep out an instant, and the hands of all men would be raised to take and slay him.

I resolved in my future conduct to redeem the past; and I can say with honesty that my resolve was fruitful of some good. You know yourself how earnestly, in the last months of the last year, I laboured to relieve suffering; you know that much was done for others, and that the days passed quietly, almost happily for myself. Nor can I truly say that I wearied of this beneficent and innocent life; I think instead that I daily enjoyed it more completely; but I was still cursed with my duality of purpose; and as the first edge of my penitence wore off, the lower side of me, so long indulged, so recently chained down, began to growl for license. Not that I dreamed of resuscitating Hyde; the bare idea of that would startle me to frenzy: no, it was in my own person that I was once more tempted to trifle with my conscience; and it was as an ordinary secret sinner that I at last fell before the assaults of temptation.

There comes an end to all things; the most capacious measure is filled at last; and this brief condescension to my evil finally destroyed the balance of my soul. And yet I was not alarmed; the fall seemed natural, like a return to the old days before I had made my discovery. It was a fine, clear, January day, wet under foot where the frost had melted, but cloudless overhead; and the Regent's Park was full of winter chirrupings and sweet with spring odours. I sat in the sun on a bench; the animal within me licking the chops of memory; the spiritual side a little drowsed, promising subsequent penitence, but not yet moved to begin. After all, I reflected, I was like my neighbours; and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active good-will with the lazy cruelty of their neglect. And at the very moment of that vainglorious thought, a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most deadly shuddering. These passed away, and left me faint; and then as in its turn faintness subsided, I began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thoughts, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation. I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy. I was once more Edward Hyde. A moment before I had been safe of all men's respect, wealthy, beloved – the cloth laying for me in

the dining-room at home; and now I was the common quarry of mankind, hunted, houseless, a known murderer, thrall to the gallows.

My reason wavered, but it did not fail me utterly. I have more than once observed that, in my second character, my faculties seemed sharpened to a point and my spirits more tensely elastic; thus it came about that, where Jekyll perhaps might have succumbed, Hyde rose to the importance of the moment. My drugs were in one of the presses of my cabinet; how was I to reach them? That was the problem that (crushing my temples in my hands) I set myself to solve. The laboratory door I had closed. If I sought to enter by the house, my own servants would consign me to the gallows. I saw I must employ another hand, and thought of Lanyon. How was he to be reached? how persuaded? Supposing that I escaped capture in the streets, how was I to make my way into his presence? and how should I, an unknown and displeasing visitor, prevail on the famous physician to rifle the study of his colleague, Dr Jekyll? Then I remembered that of my original character, one part remained to me: I could write my own hand; and once I had conceived that kindling spark, the way that I must follow became lighted up from end to end.

Thereupon, I arranged my clothes as best I could, and summoning a passing hansom, drove to an hotel in Portland Street, the name of which I chanced to remember. At my appearance (which was indeed comical enough, however tragic a fate these garments covered) the driver could not conceal his mirth. I gnashed my teeth upon him with a gust of devilish fury; and the smile withered from his face – happily for him – yet more happily for myself, for in another instant I had certainly dragged him from his perch. At the inn, as I entered, I looked about me with so black a countenance as made the attendants tremble; not a look did they exchange in my presence; but obsequiously took my orders, led me to a private room, and brought me wherewithal to write. Hyde in danger of his life was a creature new to me; shaken with inordinate anger, strung to the pitch of murder, lusting to inflict pain. Yet the creature was astute; mastered his fury with a great effort of the will; composed his two important letters, one to Lanyon and one to Poole; and that he might receive actual evidence of their being posted, sent them out with directions that they should be registered. Thenceforward, he sat all day over the fire in the private room, gnawing his nails; there he dined, sitting alone with his fears, the waiter visibly quailing

before his eye; and thence, when the night was fully come, he set forth in the corner of a closed cab, and was driven to and fro about the streets of the city. He, I say – I cannot say, I. That child of Hell had nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred. And when at last, thinking the driver had begun to grow suspicious, he discharged the cab and ventured on foot, attired in his misfitting clothes, an object marked out for observation, into the midst of the nocturnal passengers, these two base passions raged within him like a tempest. He walked fast, hunted by his fears, chattering to himself, skulking through the less frequented thoroughfares, counting the minutes that still divided him from midnight. Once a woman spoke to him, offering, I think, a box of lights. He smote her in the face, and she fled.

When I came to myself at Lanyon's, the horror of my old friend perhaps affected me somewhat: I do not know; it was at least but a drop in the sea to the abhorrence with which I looked back upon these hours. A change had come over me. It was no longer the fear of the gallows, it was the horror of being Hyde that racked me. I received Lanyon's condemnation partly in a dream; it was partly in a dream that I came home to my own house and got into bed. I slept after the prostration of the day, with a stringent and profound slumber which not even the nightmares that wrung me could avail to break. I awoke in the morning shaken, weakened, but refreshed. I still hated and feared the thought of the brute that slept within me, and I had not of course forgotten the appalling dangers of the day before; but I was once more at home, in my own house and close to my drugs; and gratitude for my escape shone so strong in my soul that it almost rivalled the brightness of hope.

I was stepping leisurely across the court after breakfast, drinking the chill of the air with pleasure, when I was seized again with those indescribable sensations that heralded the change; and I had but the time to gain the shelter of my cabinet, before I was once again raging and freezing with the passions of Hyde. It took on this occasion a double dose to recall me to myself; and alas! six hours after, as I sat looking sadly in the fire, the pangs returned, and the drug had to be re-administered. In short, from that day forth it seemed only by a great effort as of gymnastics, and only under the immediate stimulation of the drug, that I was able to wear the countenance of Jekyll. At all hours of the day and night, I would be taken with the premonitory shudder; above all, if I slept, or even dozed for a moment in

my chair, it was always as Hyde that I awakened. Under the strain of this continually impending doom and by the sleeplessness to which I now condemned myself, ay, even beyond what I had thought possible to man, I became, in my own person, a creature eaten up and emptied by fever, languidly weak both in body and mind, and solely occupied by one thought: the horror of my other self. But when I slept, or when the virtue of the medicine wore off, I would leap almost without transition (for the pangs of transformation grew daily less marked) into the possession of a fancy brimming with images of terror, a soul boiling with causeless hatreds, and a body that seemed not strong enough to contain the raging energies of life. The powers of Hyde seemed to have grown with the sickliness of Jekyll. And certainly the hate that now divided them was equal on each side. With Jekyll, it was a thing of vital instinct. He had now seen the full deformity of that creature that shared with him some of the phenomena of consciousness, and was co-heir with him to death: and beyond these links of community, which in themselves made the most poignant part of his distress, he thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life. And this again, that that insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer than an eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born; and at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him, and deposed him out of life. The hatred of Hyde for Jekyll was of a different order. His terror of the gallows drove him continually to commit temporary suicide, and return to his subordinate station of a part instead of a person; but he loathed the necessity, he loathed the despondency into which Jekyll was now fallen, and he resented the dislike with which he was himself regarded. Hence the ape-like tricks that he would play me, scrawling in my own hand blasphemies on the pages of my books, burning the letters and destroying the portrait of my father; and indeed, had it not been for his fear of death, he would long ago have ruined himself in order to involve me in the ruin. But his love of life is wonderful; I go further: I, who sicken and freeze at the mere thought of him, when I recall the abjection and passion of this attachment, and when I know how

he fears my power to cut him off by suicide, I find it in my heart to pity him.

It is useless, and the time awfully fails me, to prolong this description; no one has ever suffered such torments, let that suffice; and yet even to these, habit brought – no, not alleviation – but a certain callousness of soul, a certain acquiescence of despair; and my punishment might have gone on for years, but for the last calamity which has now fallen, and which has finally severed me from my own face and nature. My provision of the salt, which had never been renewed since the date of the first experiment, began to run low. I sent out for a fresh supply and mixed the draught; the ebullition followed, and the first change of colour, not the second; I drank it and it was without efficiency. You will learn from Poole how I have had London ransacked; it was in vain; and I am now persuaded that my first supply was impure, and that it was that unknown impurity which lent efficacy to the draught.

About a week has passed, and I am now finishing this statement under the influence of the last of the old powders. This, then, is the last time, short of a miracle, that Henry Jekyll can think his own thoughts or see his own face (now how sadly altered!) in the glass. Nor must I delay too long to bring my writing to an end; for if my narrative has hitherto escaped destruction, it has been by a combination of great prudence and great good luck. Should the throes of change take me in the act of writing it, Hyde will tear it in pieces; but if some time shall have elapsed after I have laid it by, his wonderful selfishness and circumscription to the moment will probably save it once again from the action of his ape-like spite. And indeed the doom that is closing on us both has already changed and crushed him. Half an hour from now, when I shall again and forever reindue that hated personality, I know how I shall sit shuddering and weeping in my chair, or continue, with the most strained and fearstruck ecstasy of listening, to pace up and down this room (my last earthly refuge) and give ear to every sound of menace. Will Hyde die upon the scaffold? or will he find courage to release himself at the last moment? God knows; I am careless; this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end.

A Lodging for the Night

A Story of Francis Villon

It was late in November, 1456. The snow fell over Paris with rigorous, relentless persistence; sometimes the wind made a sally and scattered it in flying vortices; sometimes there was a lull, and flake after flake descended out of the black night air, silent, circuitous, interminable. To poor people, looking up under moist eyebrows, it seemed a wonder where it all came from. Master Francis Villon had propounded an alternative that afternoon, at a tavern window: was it only Pagan Jupiter plucking geese upon Olympus? or were the holy angels moulting? He was only a poor Master of Arts, he went on; and as the question somewhat touched upon divinity, he durst not venture to conclude. A silly old priest from Montargis, who was among the company, treated the young rascal to a bottle of wine in honour of the jest and grimaces with which it was accompanied, and swore on his own white beard that he had been just such another irreverent dog when he was Villon's age.

The air was raw and pointed, but not far below freezing; and the flakes were large, damp, and adhesive. The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a footfall given the alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the black ground of the river. High up overhead the snow settled among the tracery of the cathedral towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head. The gargoyles had been transformed into great false noses, drooping towards the point. The crockets were like upright pillows swollen on one side. In the intervals of the wind, there was a dull sound of dripping about the precincts of the church.

The cemetery of St John had taken its own share of the snow. All the graves were decently covered; tall white housetops stood around in grave array; worthy burghers were long ago in bed, benightcapped like their

domiciles; there was no light in all the neighbourhood but a little peep from a lamp that hung swinging in the church choir, and tossed the shadows to and fro in time to its oscillations. The clock was hard on ten when the patrol went by with halberds and a lantern, beating their hands; and they saw nothing suspicious about the cemetery of St John.

Yet there was a small house, backed up against the cemetery wall, which was still awake, and awake to evil purpose, in that snoring district. There was not much to betray it from without; only a stream of warm vapour from the chimney-top, a patch where the snow melted on the roof, and a few half-obliterated footprints at the door. But within, behind the shuttered windows, Master Francis Villon the poet, and some of the thievish crew with whom he consorted, were keeping the night alive and passing round the bottle.

A great pile of living embers diffused a strong and ruddy glow from the arched chimney. Before this straddled Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk, with his skirts picked up and his fat legs bared to the comfortable warmth. His dilated shadow cut the room in half; and the firelight only escaped on either side of his broad person, and in a little pool between his outspread feet. His face had the beery, bruised appearance of the continual drinker's; it was covered with a network of congested veins, purple in ordinary circumstances, but now pale violet, for even with his back to the fire the cold pinched him on the other side. His cowl had half fallen back, and made a strange excrescence on either side of his bull neck. So he straddled, grumbling, and cut the room in half with the shadow of his portly frame.

On the right, Villon and Guy Tabary were huddled together over a scrap of parchment; Villon making a ballade which he was to call the 'Ballade of Roast Fish,' and Tabary spluttering admiration at his shoulder. The poet was a rag of a man, dark, little, and lean, with hollow cheeks and thin black locks. He carried his four-and-twenty years with feverish animation. Greed had made folds about his eyes, evil smiles had puckered his mouth. The wolf and pig struggled together in his face. It was an eloquent, sharp, ugly, earthly countenance. His hands were small and prehensile, with fingers knotted like a cord; and they were continually flickering in front of him in violent and expressive pantomime. As for Tabary, a broad, complacent, admiring imbecility breathed from his squash nose and slobbering lips: he had become a thief, just as he might have become the most decent of

burgesses, by the imperious chance that rules the lives of human geese and human donkeys.

At the monk's other hand, Montigny and Thevenin Pensete played a game of chance. About the first there clung some flavour of good birth and training, as about a fallen angel; something long, lithe, and courtly in the person; something aquiline and darkling in the face. Thevenin, poor soul, was in great feather: he had done a good stroke of knavery that afternoon in the Faubourg St Jacques, and all night he had been gaining from Montigny. A flat smile illuminated his face; his bald head shone rosily in a garland of red curls; his little protuberant stomach shook with silent chucklings as he swept in his gains.

'Doubles or quits?' said Thevenin.

Montigny nodded grimly.

'*Some may prefer to dine in state*,' wrote Villon, '*Or bread and cheese on silver plate*. Or, or – help me out, Guido!'

Tabary giggled.

'*Or parsley on a golden dish*,' scribbled the poet.

The wind was freshening without; it drove the snow before it, and sometimes raised its voice in a victorious whoop, and made sepulchral grumblings in the chimney. The cold was growing sharper as the night went on. Villon, protruding his lips, imitated the gust with something between a whistle and a groan. It was an eerie, uncomfortable talent of the poet's, much detested by the Picardy monk.

'Can't you hear it rattle in the gibbet?' said Villon. 'They are all dancing the devil's jig on nothing, up there. You may dance, my gallants, you'll be none the warmer! Whew! what a gust! Down went somebody just now! A medlar the fewer on the three-legged medlar-tree! – I say, Dom Nicolas, it'll be cold to-night on the St Denis Road?' he asked.

Dom Nicolas winked both his big eyes, and seemed to choke upon his Adam's apple. Montfaucon, the great grisly Paris gibbet, stood hard by the St Denis Road, and the pleasantry touched him on the raw. As for Tabary, he laughed immoderately over the medlars; he had never heard anything more light-hearted; and he held his sides and crowed. Villon fetched him a fillip on the nose, which turned his mirth into an attack of coughing.

'Oh, stop that row,' said Villon, 'and think of rhymes to "fish".'

'Doubles or quits,' said Montigny doggedly.

‘With all my heart,’ quoth Thevenin.

‘Is there any more in that bottle?’ asked the monk.

‘Open another,’ said Villon. ‘How do you ever hope to fill that big hogshead, your body, with little things like bottles? And how do you expect to get to heaven? How many angels, do you fancy, can be spared to carry up a single monk from Picardy? Or do you think yourself another Elias – and they’ll send the coach for you?’

‘*Hominibus impossibile*,’ replied the monk as he filled his glass.

Tabary was in ecstasies.

Villon filliped his nose again.

‘Laugh at my jokes, if you like,’ he said.

‘It was very good,’ objected Tabary.

Villon made a face at him. ‘Think of rhymes to “fish”,’ he said. ‘What have you to do with Latin? You’ll wish you knew none of it at the great assizes, when the devil calls for Guido Tabary, clericus – the devil with the hump-back and red-hot finger-nails. Talking of the devil,’ he added in a whisper, ‘look at Montigny!’

All three peered covertly at the gamester. He did not seem to be enjoying his luck. His mouth was a little to a side; one nostril nearly shut, and the other much inflated. The black dog was on his back, as people say, in terrifying nursery metaphor; and he breathed hard under the gruesome burthen.

‘He looks as if he could knife him,’ whispered Tabary, with round eyes.

The monk shuddered, and turned his face and spread his open hands to the red embers. It was the cold that thus affected Dom Nicolas, and not any excess of moral sensibility.

‘Come now,’ said Villon – ‘about this ballade. How does it run so far?’ And beating time with his hand, he read it aloud to Tabary.

They were interrupted at the fourth rhyme by a brief and fatal movement among the gamesters. The round was completed, and Thevenin was just opening his mouth to claim another victory, when Montigny leaped up, swift as an adder, and stabbed him to the heart. The blow took effect before he had time to utter a cry, before he had time to move. A tremor or two convulsed his frame; his hands opened and shut, his heels rattled on the floor; then his head rolled backward over one shoulder with the eyes wide open; and Thevenin Pensete’s spirit had returned to Him who made it.

Every one sprang to his feet; but the business was over in two twos. The four living fellows looked at each other in rather a ghastly fashion; the dead man contemplating a corner of the roof with a singular and ugly leer.

'My God!' said Tabary; and he began to pray in Latin.

Villon broke out into hysterical laughter. He came a step forward and ducked a ridiculous bow at Thevenin, and laughed still louder. Then he sat down suddenly, all of a heap, upon a stool, and continued laughing bitterly, as though he would shake himself to pieces.

Montigny recovered his composure first.

'Let's see what he has about him,' he remarked, and he picked the dead man's pockets with a practised hand, and divided the money into four equal portions on the table. 'There's for you,' he said.

The monk received his share with a deep sigh, and a single stealthy glance at the dead Thevenin, who was beginning to sink into himself and topple sideways off the chair.

'We're all in for it,' cried Villon, swallowing his mirth. 'It's a hanging job for every man jack of us that's here – not to speak of those who aren't.' He made a shocking gesture in the air with his raised right hand, and put out his tongue and threw his head on one side, so as to counterfeit the appearance of one who has been hanged. Then he pocketed his share of the spoil, and executed a shuffle with his feet as if to restore the circulation.

Tabary was the last to help himself; he made a dash at the money, and retired to the other end of the apartment.

Montigny stuck Thevenin upright in the chair, and drew out the dagger, which was followed by a jet of blood.

'You fellows had better be moving,' he said, as he wiped the blade on his victim's doublet.

'I think we had,' returned Villon, with a gulp. 'Damn his fat head!' he broke out. 'It sticks in my throat like phlegm. What right has a man to have red hair when he is dead?' And he fell all of a heap again upon the stool, and fairly covered his face with his hands.

Montigny and Dom Nicolas laughed aloud, even Tabary feebly chiming in.

'Cry baby,' said the monk.

'I always said he was a woman,' added Montigny, with a sneer. 'Sit up, can't you?' he went on, giving another shake to the murdered body. 'Tread

out that fire, Nick!'

But Nick was better employed; he was quietly taking Villon's purse, as the poet sat, limp and trembling, on the stool where he had been making a ballade not three minutes before. Montigny and Tabary dumbly demanded a share of the booty, which the monk silently promised as he passed the little bag into the bosom of his gown. In many ways an artistic nature unfits a man for practical existence.

No sooner had the theft been accomplished than Villon shook himself, jumped to his feet, and began helping to scatter and extinguish the embers. Meanwhile Montigny opened the door and cautiously peered into the street. The coast was clear; there was no meddlesome patrol in sight. Still it was judged wiser to slip out severally; and as Villon was himself in a hurry to escape from the neighbourhood of the dead Thevenin, and the rest were in a still greater hurry to get rid of him before he should discover the loss of his money, he was the first by general consent to issue forth into the street.

The wind had triumphed and swept all the clouds from heaven. Only a few vapours, as thin as moonlight, fleeted rapidly across the stars. It was bitter cold; and by a common optical effect, things seemed almost more definite than in the broadest daylight. The sleeping city was absolutely still; a company of white hoods, a field full of little alps, below the twinkling stars. Villon cursed his fortune. Would it were still snowing! Now, wherever he went, he left an indelible trail behind him on the glittering streets; wherever he went he was still tethered to the house by the cemetery of St John; wherever he went he must weave, with his own plodding feet, the rope that bound him to the crime and would bind him to the gallows. The leer of the dead man came back to him with a new significance. He snapped his fingers as if to pluck up his own spirits, and choosing a street at random, stepped boldly forward in the snow.

Two things preoccupied him as he went: the aspect of the gallows at Montfaucon in this bright, windy phase of the night's existence, for one; and for another, the look of the dead man with his bald head and garland of red curls. Both struck cold upon his heart, and he kept quickening his pace as if he could escape from unpleasant thoughts by mere fleetness of foot. Sometimes he looked back over his shoulder with a sudden nervous jerk; but he was the only moving thing in the white streets, except when the wind

swooped round a corner and threw up the snow, which was beginning to freeze, in spouts of glittering dust.

Suddenly he saw, a long way before him, a black clump and a couple of lanterns. The clump was in motion, and the lanterns swung as though carried by men walking. It was a patrol. And though it was merely crossing his line of march he judged it wiser to get out of eyeshot as speedily as he could. He was not in the humour to be challenged, and he was conscious of making a very conspicuous mark upon the snow. Just on his left hand there stood a great hotel, with some turrets and a large porch before the door; it was half ruinous, he remembered, and had long stood empty; and so he made three steps of it, and jumped into the shelter of the porch. It was pretty dark inside, after the glimmer of the snowy streets, and he was groping forward with outspread hands, when he stumbled over some substance which offered an indescribable mixture of resistances, hard and soft, firm and loose. His heart gave a leap, and he sprang two steps back and stared dreadfully at the obstacle. Then he gave a little laugh of relief. It was only a woman, and she dead. He knelt beside her to make sure upon this latter point. She was freezing cold, and rigid like a stick. A little ragged finery fluttered in the wind about her hair, and her cheeks had been heavily rouged that same afternoon. Her pockets were quite empty; but in her stocking, underneath the garter, Villon found two of the small coins that went by the name of whites. It was little enough; but it was always something; and the poet was moved with a deep sense of pathos that she should have died before she had spent her money. That seemed to him a dark and pitiable mystery; and he looked from the coins in his hand to the dead woman, and back again to the coins, shaking his head over the riddle of man's life. Henry V. of England, dying at Vincennes just after he had conquered France, and this poor jade cut off by a cold draught in a great man's doorway, before she had time to spend her couple of whites – it seemed a cruel way to carry on the world. Two whites would have taken such a little while to squander; and yet it would have been one more good taste in the mouth, one more smack of the lips, before the devil got the soul, and the body was left to birds and vermin. He would like to use all his tallow before the light was blown out and the lantern broken.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was feeling, half mechanically, for his purse. Suddenly his heart stopped beating; a feeling of

cold scales passed up the back of his legs, and a cold blow seemed to fall upon his scalp. He stood petrified for a moment; then he felt again with one feverish movement; and then his loss burst upon him, and he was covered at once with perspiration. To spendthrifts money is so living and actual – it is such a thin veil between them and their pleasures! There is only one limit to their fortune – that of time; and a spendthrift with only a few crowns is the Emperor of Rome until they are spent. For such a person to lose his money is to suffer the most shocking reverse, and fall from heaven to hell, from all to nothing, in a breath. And all the more if he has put his head in the halter for it; if he may be hanged to-morrow for that same purse, so dearly earned, so foolishly departed! Villon stood and cursed; he threw the two whites into the street; he shook his fist at heaven; he stamped, and was not horrified to find himself trampling the poor corpse. Then he began rapidly to retrace his steps towards the house beside the cemetery. He had forgotten all fear of the patrol, which was long gone by at any rate, and had no idea but that of his lost purse. It was in vain that he looked right and left upon the snow: nothing was to be seen. He had not dropped it in the streets. Had it fallen in the house? He would have liked dearly to go in and see; but the idea of the grisly occupant unmanned him. And he saw besides, as he drew near, that their efforts to put out the fire had been unsuccessful; on the contrary, it had broken into a blaze, and a changeful light played in the chinks of door and window, and revived his terror for the authorities and Paris gibbet.

He returned to the hotel with the porch, and groped about upon the snow for the money he had thrown away in his childish passion. But he could only find one white; the other had probably struck sideways and sunk deeply in. With a single white in his pocket, all his projects for a rousing night in some wild tavern vanished utterly away. And it was not only pleasure that fled laughing from his grasp; positive discomfort, positive pain, attacked him as he stood ruefully before the porch. His perspiration had dried upon him; and although the wind had now fallen, a binding frost was setting in stronger with every hour, and he felt benumbed and sick at heart. What was to be done? Late as was the hour, improbable as was success, he would try the house of his adopted father, the chaplain of St Benoît.

He ran there all the way, and knocked timidly. There was no answer. He knocked again and again, taking heart with every stroke; and at last steps

were heard approaching from within. A barred wicket fell open in the iron-studded door, and emitted a gush of yellow light.

‘Hold up your face to the wicket,’ said the chaplain from within.

‘It’s only me,’ whimpered Villon.

‘Oh, it’s only you, is it?’ returned the chaplain; and he cursed him with foul unpriestly oaths for disturbing him at such an hour, and bade him be off to hell, where he came from.

‘My hands are blue to the wrist,’ pleaded Villon; ‘my feet are dead and full of twinges; my nose aches with the sharp air; the cold lies at my heart. I may be dead before morning. Only this once, father, and before God, I will never ask again!’

‘You should have come earlier,’ said the ecclesiastic coolly. ‘Young men require a lesson now and then.’ He shut the wicket and retired deliberately into the interior of the house.

Villon was beside himself; he beat upon the door with his hands and feet, and shouted hoarsely after the chaplain.

‘Wormy old fox!’ he cried. ‘If I had my hand under your twist, I would send you flying headlong into the bottomless pit.’

A door shut in the interior, faintly audible to the poet down long passages. He passed his hand over his mouth with an oath. And then the humour of the situation struck him, and he laughed and looked lightly up to heaven, where the stars seemed to be winking over his discomfiture.

What was to be done? It looked very like a night in the frosty streets. The idea of the dead woman popped into his imagination, and gave him a hearty fright; what had happened to her in the early night might very well happen to him before morning. And he so young! and with such immense possibilities of disorderly amusement before him! He felt quite pathetic over the notion of his own fate, as if it had been some one else’s, and made a little imaginative vignette of the scene in the morning when they should find his body.

He passed all his chances under review, turning the white between his thumb and forefinger. Unfortunately he was on bad terms with some old friends who would once have taken pity on him in such a plight. He had lampooned them in verses; he had beaten and cheated them; and yet now, when he was in so close a pinch, he thought there was at least one who

might perhaps relent. It was a chance. It was worth trying at least, and he would go and see.

On the way, two little accidents happened to him which coloured his musings in a very different manner. For, first, he fell in with the track of a patrol, and walked in it for some hundred yards, although it lay out of his direction. And this spirited him up; at least he had confused his trail; for he was still possessed with the idea of people tracking him all about Paris over the snow, and collaring him next morning before he was awake. The other matter affected him quite differently. He passed a street corner, where, not so long before, a woman and her child had been devoured by wolves. This was just the kind of weather, he reflected, when wolves might take it into their heads to enter Paris again; and a lone man in these deserted streets would run the chance of something worse than a mere scare. He stopped and looked upon the place with an unpleasant interest – it was a centre where several lanes intersected each other; and he looked down them all, one after another, and held his breath to listen, lest he should detect some galloping black things on the snow or hear the sound of howling between him and the river. He remembered his mother telling him the story and pointing out the spot, while he was yet a child. His mother! If he only knew where she lived, he might make sure at least of shelter. He determined he would inquire upon the morrow; nay, he would go and see her too, poor old girl! So thinking, he arrived at his destination – his last hope for the night.

The house was quite dark, like its neighbours; and yet after a few taps, he heard a movement overhead, a door opening, and a cautious voice asking who was there. The poet named himself in a loud whisper, and waited, not without some trepidation, the result. Nor had he to wait long. A window was suddenly opened, and a pailful of slops splashed down upon the doorstep. Villon had not been unprepared for something of the sort, and had put himself as much in shelter as the nature of the porch admitted; but for all that, he was deplorably drenched below the waist. His hose began to freeze almost at once. Death from cold and exposure stared him in the face; he remembered he was of phthisical tendency, and began coughing tentatively. But the gravity of the danger steadied his nerves. He stopped a few hundred yards from the door where he had been so rudely used, and reflected with his finger to his nose. He could only see one way of getting a lodging, and that was to take it. He had noticed a house not far away, which

looked as if it might be easily broken into, and thither he betook himself promptly, entertaining himself on the way with the idea of a room still hot, with a table still loaded with the remains of supper, where he might pass the rest of the black hours and whence he should issue, on the morrow, with an armful of valuable plate. He even considered on what viands and what wines he should prefer; and as he was calling the roll of his favourite dainties, roast fish presented itself to his mind with an odd mixture of amusement and horror.

'I shall never finish that ballade,' he thought to himself; and then, with another shudder at the recollection, 'Oh, damn his fat head!' he repeated fervently, and spat upon the snow.

The house in question looked dark at first sight; but as Villon made a preliminary inspection in search of the handiest point of attack, a little twinkle of light caught his eye from behind a curtained window.

'The devil!' he thought. 'People awake! Some student or some saint, confound the crew! Can't they get drunk and lie in bed snoring like their neighbours? What's the good of curfew, and poor devils of bell-ringers jumping at a rope's end in bell-towers? What's the use of day, if people sit up all night? The gripes to them!' He grinned as he saw where his logic was leading him. 'Every man to his business, after all,' added he, 'and if they're awake, by the Lord, I may come by a supper honestly for once, and cheat the devil.'

He went boldly to the door and knocked with an assured hand. On both previous occasions, he had knocked timidly and with some dread of attracting notice; but now when he had just discarded the thought of a burglarious entry, knocking at a door seemed a mighty simple and innocent proceeding. The sound of his blows echoed through the house with thin, phantasmal reverberations, as though it were quite empty; but these had scarcely died away before a measured tread drew near, a couple of bolts were withdrawn, and one wing was opened broadly, as though no guile or fear of guile were known to those within. A tall figure of a man, muscular and spare, but a little bent, confronted Villon. The head was massive in bulk, but finely sculptured; the nose blunt at the bottom, but refining upward to where it joined a pair of strong and honest eyebrows; the mouth and eyes surrounded with delicate markings, and the whole face based upon a thick white beard, boldly and squarely trimmed. Seen as it was by the

light of a flickering hand-lamp, it looked perhaps nobler than it had a right to do; but it was a fine face, honourable rather than intelligent, strong, simple, and righteous.

'You knock late, sir,' said the old man in resonant, courteous tones.

Villon cringed and brought up many servile words of apology; at a crisis of this sort the beggar was uppermost in him, and the man of genius hid his head with confusion.

'You are cold,' repeated the old man, 'and hungry? Well, step in.' And he ordered him into the house with a noble enough gesture.

'Some great seigneur,' thought Villon, as his host, setting down the lamp on the flagged pavement of the entry, shot the bolts once more into their places.

'You will pardon me if I go in front,' he said, when this was done; and he preceded the poet up-stairs into a large apartment, warmed with a pan of charcoal and lit by a great lamp hanging from the roof. It was very bare of furniture: only some gold plate on a sideboard; some folios; and a stand of armour between the windows. Some smart tapestry hung upon the walls, representing the crucifixion of our Lord in one piece, and in another a scene of shepherds and shepherdesses by a running stream. Over the chimney was a shield of arms.

'Will you seat yourself,' said the old man, 'and forgive me if I leave you? I am alone in my house to-night, and if you are to eat I must forage for you myself.'

No sooner was his host gone than Villon leaped from the chair on which he had just seated himself, and began examining the room, with the stealth and passion of a cat. He weighed the gold flagons in his hand, opened all the folios, and investigated the arms upon the shield, and the stuff with which the seats were lined. He raised the window curtains, and saw that the windows were set with rich stained glass in figures, so far as he could see, of martial import. Then he stood in the middle of the room, drew a long breath, and retaining it with puffed cheeks, looked round and round him, turning on his heels, as if to impress every feature of the apartment on his memory.

'Seven pieces of plate,' he said. 'If there had been ten, I would have risked it. A fine house, and a fine old master, so help me all the saints!'

And just then, hearing the old man's tread returning along the corridor, he stole back to his chair, and began humbly toasting his wet legs before the charcoal pan.

His entertainer had a plate of meat in one hand and a jug of wine in the other. He set down the plate upon the table, motioning Villon to draw in his chair, and going to the sideboard, brought back two goblets which he filled.

'I drink your better fortune,' he said, gravely touching Villon's cup with his own.

'To our better acquaintance,' said the poet, growing bold. A mere man of the people would have been awed by the courtesy of the old seigneur, but Villon was hardened in that matter; he had made mirth for great lords before now, and found them as black rascals as himself. And so he devoted himself to the viands with a ravenous gusto, while the old man, leaning backward, watched him with steady, curious eyes.

'You have blood on your shoulder, my man,' he said.

Montigny must have laid his wet right hand upon him as he left the house. He cursed Montigny in his heart.

'It was none of my shedding,' he stammered.

'I had not supposed so,' returned his host quietly. 'A brawl?'

'Well, something of that sort,' Villon admitted with a quaver.

'Perhaps a fellow murdered?'

'Oh, no, not murdered,' said the poet, more and more confused. 'It was all fair play – murdered by accident. I had no hand in it, God strike me dead!' he added fervently.

'One rogue the fewer, I dare say,' observed the master of the house.

'You may dare to say that,' agreed Villon, infinitely relieved. 'As big a rogue as there is between here and Jerusalem. He turned up his toes like a lamb. But it was a nasty thing to look at. I dare say you've seen dead men in your time, my lord?' he added, glancing at the armour.

'Many,' said the old man. 'I have followed the wars, as you imagine.'

Villon laid down his knife and fork, which he had just taken up again.

'Were any of them bald?' he asked.

'Oh, yes, and with hair as white as mine.'

'I don't think I should mind the white so much,' said Villon. 'His was red.' And he had a return of his shuddering and tendency to laughter, which he drowned with a great draught of wine. 'I'm a little put out when I think

of it,' he went on. 'I knew him – damn him! And then the cold gives a man fancies – or the fancies give a man cold, I don't know which.'

'Have you any money?' asked the old man.

'I have one white,' returned the poet, laughing. 'I got it out of a dead jade's stocking in a porch. She was as dead as Cæsar, poor wench, and as cold as a church, with bits of ribbon sticking in her hair. This is a hard world in winter for wolves and wenches and poor rogues like me.'

'I,' said the old man, 'am Enguerrand de la Feuillée, seigneur de Brisetout, bailly du Patatrac. Who and what may you be?'

Villon rose and made a suitable reverence. 'I am called Francis Villon,' he said, 'a poor Master of Arts of this university. I know some Latin, and a deal of vice. I can make chansons, ballades, lais, virelais, and roundels, and I am very fond of wine. I was born in a garret, and I shall not improbably die upon the gallows. I may add, my lord, that from this night forward I am your lordship's very obsequious servant to command.'

'No servant of mine,' said the knight; 'my guest for this evening, and no more.'

'A very grateful guest,' said Villon politely, and he drank in dumb show to his entertainer.

'You are shrewd,' began the old man, tapping his forehead, 'very shrewd; you have learning; you are a clerk; and yet you take a small piece of money off a dead woman in the street. Is it not a kind of theft?'

'It is a kind of theft much practised in the wars, my lord.'

'The wars are the field of honour,' returned the old man proudly. 'There a man plays his life upon the cast; he fights in the name of his lord the king, his Lord God, and all their lordships the holy saints and angels.'

'Put it,' said Villon, 'that I were really a thief, should I not play my life also, and against heavier odds?'

'For gain but not for honour.'

'Gain?' repeated Villon with a shrug. 'Gain! The poor fellow wants supper, and takes it. So does the soldier in a campaign. Why, what are all these requisitions we hear so much about? If they are not gain to those who take them, they are loss enough to the others. The men-at-arms drink by a good fire, while the burgher bites his nails to buy them wine and wood. I have seen a good many ploughmen swinging on trees about the country; ay, I have seen thirty on one elm, and a very poor figure they made; and when I

asked some one how all these came to be hanged, I was told it was because they could not scrape together enough crowns to satisfy the men-at-arms.'

'These things are a necessity of war, which the low-born must endure with constancy. It is true that some captains drive overhard; there are spirits in every rank not easily moved by pity; and indeed many follow arms who are no better than brigands.'

'You see,' said the poet, 'you cannot separate the soldier from the brigand; and what is a thief but an isolated brigand with circumspect manners? I steal a couple of mutton chops, without so much as disturbing people's sleep; the farmer grumbles a bit, but sups none the less wholesomely on what remains. You come up blowing gloriously on a trumpet, take away the whole sheep, and beat the farmer pitifully into the bargain. I have no trumpet; I am only Tom, Dick, or Harry; I am a rogue and a dog, and hanging's too good for me – with all my heart; but just ask the farmer which of us he prefers, just find out which of us he lies awake to curse on cold nights.'

'Look at us two,' said his lordship. 'I am old, strong, and honoured. If I were turned from my house to-morrow, hundreds would be proud to shelter me. Poor people would go out and pass the night in the streets with their children, if I merely hinted that I wished to be alone. And I find you up, wandering homeless, and picking farthings off dead women by the wayside! I fear no man and nothing; I have seen you tremble and lose countenance at a word. I wait God's summons contentedly in my own house, or, if it please the king to call me out again, upon the field of battle. You look for the gallows; a rough, swift death, without hope or honour. Is there no difference between these two?'

'As far as to the moon,' Villon acquiesced. 'But if I had been born lord of Brisetout, and you had been the poor scholar Francis, would the difference have been any the less? Should not I have been warming my knees at this charcoal pan, and would not you have been groping for farthings in the snow? Should not I have been the soldier, and you the thief?'

'A thief?' cried the old man. 'I a thief! If you understood your words, you would repent them.'

Villon turned out his hands with a gesture of inimitable impudence. 'If your lordship had done me the honour to follow my argument!' he said.

‘I do you too much honour in submitting to your presence,’ said the knight. ‘Learn to curb your tongue when you speak with old and honourable men, or some one hastier than I may reprove you in a sharper fashion.’ And he rose and paced the lower end of the apartment, struggling with anger and antipathy. Villon surreptitiously refilled his cup, and settled himself more comfortably in the chair, crossing his knees and leaning his head upon one hand and the elbow against the back of the chair. He was now replete and warm; and he was in nowise frightened for his host, having gauged him as justly as was possible between two such different characters. The night was far spent, and in a very comfortable fashion after all; and he felt morally certain of a safe departure on the morrow.

‘Tell me one thing,’ said the old man, pausing in his walk. ‘Are you really a thief?’

‘I claim the sacred rights of hospitality,’ returned the poet. ‘My lord, I am.’

‘You are very young,’ the knight continued.

‘I should never have been so old,’ replied Villon, showing his fingers, ‘if I had not helped myself with these ten talents. They have been my nursing mothers and my nursing fathers.’

‘You may still repent and change.’

‘I repent daily,’ said the poet. ‘There are few people more given to repentance than poor Francis. As for change, let somebody change my circumstances. A man must continue to eat, if it were only that he may continue to repent.’

‘The change must begin in the heart,’ returned the old man solemnly.

‘My dear lord,’ answered Villon, ‘do you really fancy that I steal for pleasure? I hate stealing, like any other piece of work or of danger. My teeth chatter when I see a gallows. But I must eat, I must drink, I must mix in society of some sort. What the devil! Man is not a solitary animal – *Cui Deus fæminam tradit*. Make me king’s pantler – make me abbot of St Denis; make me bailly of the Patatrac; and then I shall be changed indeed. But as long as you leave me the poor scholar Francis Villon, without a farthing, why, of course, I remain the same.’

‘The grace of God is all-powerful.’

‘I should be a heretic to question it,’ said Francis. ‘It has made you lord of Brisetout and bailly of the Patatrac; it has given me nothing but the quick

wits under my hat and these ten toes upon my hands. May I help myself to wine? I thank you respectfully. By God's grace, you have a very superior vintage.'

The lord of Brisetout walked to and fro with his hands behind his back. Perhaps he was not yet quite settled in his mind about the parallel between thieves and soldiers; perhaps Villon had interested him by some cross-thread of sympathy; perhaps his wits were simply muddled by so much unfamiliar reasoning; but whatever the cause, he somehow yearned to convert the young man to a better way of thinking, and could not make up his mind to drive him forth again into the street.

'There is something more than I can understand in this,' he said at length. 'Your mouth is full of subtleties, and the devil has led you very far astray; but the devil is only a very weak spirit before God's truth, and all his subtleties vanish at a word of true honour, like darkness at morning. Listen to me once more. I learned long ago that a gentleman should live chivalrously and lovingly to God, and the king, and his lady; and though I have seen many strange things done, I have still striven to command my ways upon that rule. It is not only written in all noble histories, but in every man's heart, if he will take care to read. You speak of food and wine, and I know very well that hunger is a difficult trial to endure; but you do not speak of other wants; you say nothing of honour, of faith to God and other men, of courtesy, of love without reproach. It may be that I am not very wise – and yet I think I am – but you seem to me like one who has lost his way and made a great error in life. You are attending to the little wants, and you have totally forgotten the great and only real ones, like a man who should be doctoring toothache on the Judgment Day. For such things as honour and love and faith are not only nobler than food and drink, but indeed I think we desire them more, and suffer more sharply for their absence. I speak to you as I think you will most easily understand me. Are you not, while careful to fill your belly, disregarding another appetite in your heart, which spoils the pleasure of your life and keeps you continually wretched?'

Villon was sensibly nettled under all this sermonising. 'You think I have no sense of honour!' he cried. 'I'm poor enough, God knows! It's hard to see rich people with their gloves, and you blowing in your hands. An empty belly is a bitter thing, although you speak so lightly of it. If you had had as

many as I, perhaps you would change your tune. Anyway I'm a thief – make the most of that – but I'm not a devil from hell, God strike me dead. I would have you to know I've an honour of my own, as good as yours, though I don't prate about it all day long, as if it was a God's miracle to have any. It seems quite natural to me; I keep it in its box till it's wanted. Why now, look you here, how long have I been in this room with you? Did you not tell me you were alone in the house? Look at your gold plate! You're strong, if you like, but you're old and unarmed, and I have my knife. What did I want but a jerk of the elbow and here would have been you with the cold steel in your bowels, and there would have been me, linking in the streets, with an armful of golden cups! Did you suppose I hadn't wit enough to see that? And I scorned the action. There are your damned goblets, as safe as in a church; there are you, with your heart ticking as good as new; and here am I, ready to go out again as poor as I came in, with my one white that you threw in my teeth! And you think I have no sense of honour — God strike me dead!'

The old man stretched out his right arm. 'I will tell you what you are,' he said. 'You are a rogue, my man, an impudent and black-hearted rogue and vagabond. I have passed an hour with you. Oh! believe me, I feel myself disgraced! And you have eaten and drunk at my table. But now I am sick at your presence; the day has come, and the night-bird should be off to his roost. Will you go before, or after?'

'Which you please,' returned the poet, rising. 'I believe you to be strictly honourable.' He thoughtfully emptied his cup. 'I wish I could add you were intelligent,' he went on, knocking on his head with his knuckles. 'Age! age! the brains stiff and rheumatic.'

The old man preceded him from a point of self-respect. Villon followed, whistling, with his thumbs in his girdle.

'God pity you,' said the lord of Brisetout at the door.

'Good-bye, papa,' returned Villon with a yawn. 'Many thanks for the cold mutton.'

The door closed behind him. The dawn was breaking over the white roofs. A chill, uncomfortable morning ushered in the day. Villon stood and heartily stretched himself in the middle of the road.

'A very dull old gentleman,' he thought. 'I wonder what his goblets may be worth.'

The Suicide Club

Story of the Young Man With the Cream Tarts

During his residence in London, the accomplished Prince Florizel of Bohemia gained the affection of all classes by the seduction of his manner and by a well-considered generosity. He was a remarkable man even by what was known of him; and that was but a small part of what he actually did. Although of a placid temper in ordinary circumstances, and accustomed to take the world with as much philosophy as any ploughman, the Prince of Bohemia was not without a taste for ways of life more adventurous and eccentric than that to which he was destined by his birth. Now and then, when he fell into a low humour, when there was no laughable play to witness in any of the London theatres, and when the season of the year was unsuitable to those field sports in which he excelled all competitors, he would summon his confidant and Master of the Horse, Colonel Geraldine, and bid him prepare himself against an evening ramble. The Master of the Horse was a young officer of a brave and even temerarious disposition. He greeted the news with delight, and hastened to make ready. Long practice and a varied acquaintance of life had given him a singular facility in disguise; he could adapt not only his face and bearing, but his voice and almost his thoughts, to those of any rank, character, or nation; and in this way he diverted attention from the Prince, and sometimes gained admission for the pair into strange societies. The civil authorities were never taken into the secret of these adventures; the imperturbable courage of the one and the ready invention and chivalrous devotion of the other had brought them through a score of dangerous passes; and they grew in confidence as time went on.

One evening in March they were driven by a sharp fall of sleet into an Oyster Bar in the immediate neighborhood of Leicester Square. Colonel Geraldine was dressed and painted to represent a person connected with the Press in reduced circumstances; while the Prince had, as usual, travestied

his appearance by the addition of false whiskers and a pair of large adhesive eyebrows. These lent him a shaggy and weather-beaten air, which, for one of his urbanity, formed the most impenetrable disguise. Thus equipped, the commander and his satellite sipped their brandy and soda in security.

The bar was full of guests, both male and female; but though more than one of these offered to fall into talk with our adventurers, none of them promised to grow interesting upon a nearer acquaintance. There was nothing present but the lees of London and the common-place of disrespectability; and the Prince had already fallen to yawning, and was beginning to grow weary of the whole excursion, when the swing doors were pushed violently open, and a young man, followed by a couple of commissionaires, entered the bar. Each of the commissionaires carried a large dish of cream tarts under a cover, which they at once removed; and the young man made the round of the company, and pressed these confections upon everyone's acceptance with an exaggerated courtesy. Sometimes his offer was laughingly accepted; sometimes it was firmly, or even harshly, rejected. In these latter cases the newcomer always ate the tart himself, with some more or less humourous commentary.

At last he accosted Prince Florizel.

'Sir,' said he, with a profound obeisance, proffering the tart at the same time between his thumb and forefinger, 'will you so far honour an entire stranger? I can answer for the quality of the pastry, having eaten two dozen and three of them myself since five o'clock.'

'I am in the habit,' replied the Prince, 'of looking not so much to the nature of a gift as to the spirit in which it is offered.'

'The spirit, sir,' returned the young man, with another bow, 'is one of mockery.'

'Mockery?' repeated Florizel. 'And whom do you propose to mock?'

'I am not here to expound my philosophy,' replied the other, 'but to distribute these cream tarts. If I mention that I heartily include myself in the ridicule of the transaction, I hope you will consider honour satisfied and condescend. If not, you will constrain me to eat my twenty-eighth, and I own to being weary of the exercise.'

'You touch me,' said the Prince, 'and I have all the will in the world to rescue you from this dilemma, but upon one condition. If my friend and I

eat your cakes – for which we have neither of us any natural inclination – we shall expect you to join us at supper by way of recompense.'

The young man seemed to reflect.

'I have still several dozen upon hand,' he said at last; 'and that will make it necessary for me to visit several more bars before my great affair is concluded. This will take some time; and if you are hungry—'

The Prince interrupted him with a polite gesture.

'My friend and I will accompany you,' he said: 'for we have already a deep interest in your very agreeable mode of passing an evening. And now that the preliminaries of peace are settled, allow me to sign the treaty for both.'

And the Prince swallowed the tart with the best grace imaginable.

'It is delicious,' said he.

'I perceive you are a connoisseur,' replied the young man.

Colonel Geraldine likewise did honour to the pastry; and every one in that bar having now either accepted or refused his delicacies, the young man with the cream tarts led the way to another and similar establishment. The two commissionaires, who seemed to have grown accustomed to their absurd employment, followed immediately after; and the Prince and the Colonel brought up the rear, arm in arm, and smiling to each other as they went. In this order the company visited two other taverns, where scenes were enacted of a like nature to that already described – some refusing, some accepting, the favours of this vagabond hospitality, and the young man himself eating each rejected tart.

On leaving the third saloon the young man counted his store. There were but nine remaining, three in one tray and six in the other.

'Gentlemen,' said he, addressing himself to his two new followers, 'I am unwilling to delay your supper. I am positively sure you must be hungry. I feel that I owe you a special consideration. And on this great day for me, when I am closing a career of folly by my most conspicuously silly action, I wish to behave handsomely to all who give me countenance. Gentlemen, you shall wait no longer. Although my constitution is shattered by previous excesses, at the risk of my life I liquidate the suspensory condition.'

With these words he crushed the nine remaining tarts into his mouth, and swallowed them at a single movement each. Then, turning to the commissionaires, he gave them a couple of sovereigns.

‘I have to thank you,’ said he, ‘for your extraordinary patience.’

And he dismissed them with a bow apiece. For some seconds he stood looking at the purse from which he had just paid his assistants, then, with a laugh, he tossed it into the middle of the street, and signified his readiness for supper.

In a small French restaurant in Soho, which had enjoyed an exaggerated reputation for some little while, but had already begun to be forgotten, and in a private room up two pairs of stairs, the three companions made a very elegant supper, and drank three or four bottles of champagne, talking the while upon indifferent subjects. The young man was fluent and gay, but he laughed louder than was natural in a person of polite breeding; his hands trembled violently, and his voice took sudden and surprising inflections, which seemed to be independent of his will. The dessert had been cleared away, and all three had lighted their cigars, when the Prince addressed him in these words:—

‘You will, I am sure, pardon my curiosity. What I have seen of you has greatly pleased but even more puzzled me. And though I should be loath to seem indiscreet, I must tell you that my friend and I are persons very well worthy to be entrusted with a secret. We have many of our own, which we are continually revealing to improper ears. And if, as I suppose, your story is a silly one, you need have no delicacy with us, who are two of the silliest men in England. My name is Godall, Theophilus Godall; my friend is Major Alfred Hammersmith – or at least, such is the name by which he chooses to be known. We pass our lives entirely in the search for extravagant adventures; and there is no extravagance with which we are not capable of sympathy.’

‘I like you, Mr Godall,’ returned the young man; ‘you inspire me with a natural confidence; and I have not the slightest objection to your friend, the Major; whom I take to be a nobleman in masquerade. At least, I am sure he is no soldier.’

The Colonel smiled at this compliment to the perfection of his art; and the young man went on in a more animated manner.

‘There is every reason why I should not tell you my story. Perhaps that is just the reason why I am going to do so. At least, you seem so well prepared to hear a tale of silliness that I cannot find it in my heart to disappoint you. My name, in spite of your example, I shall keep to myself. My age is not

essential to the narrative. I am descended from my ancestors by ordinary generation, and from them I inherited the very eligible human tenement which I still occupy and a fortune of three hundred pounds a year. I suppose they also handed on to me a hare-brain humour, which it has been my chief delight to indulge. I received a good education. I can play the violin nearly well enough to earn money in the orchestra of a penny gaff, but not quite. The same remark applies to the flute and the French horn. I learned enough of whist to lose about a hundred a year at that scientific game. My acquaintance with French was sufficient to enable me to squander money in Paris with almost the same facility as in London. In short, I am a person full of manly accomplishments. I have had every sort of adventure, including a duel about nothing. Only two months ago I met a young lady exactly suited to my taste in mind and body; I found my heart melt; I saw that I had come upon my fate at last, and was in the way to fall in love. But when I came to reckon up what remained to me of my capital, I found it amounted to something less than four hundred pounds! I ask you fairly – can a man who respects himself fall in love on four hundred pounds? I concluded, certainly not; left the presence of my charmer, and slightly accelerating my usual rate of expenditure, came this morning to my last eighty pounds. This I divided into two equal parts; forty I reserved for a particular purpose; the remaining forty I was to dissipate before the night. I have passed a very entertaining day, and played many farces besides that of the cream tarts which procured me the advantage of your acquaintance; for I was determined, as I told you, to bring a foolish career to a still more foolish conclusion; and when you saw me throw my purse into the street, the forty pounds were at an end. Now you know me as well as I know myself: a fool, but consistent in his folly; and, as I will ask you to believe, neither a whimperer nor a coward.'

From the whole tone of the young man's statement it was plain that he harboured very bitter and contemptuous thoughts about himself. His auditors were led to imagine that his love affair was nearer his heart than he admitted, and that he had a design on his own life. The farce of the cream tarts began to have very much the air of a tragedy in disguise.

'Why, is this not odd,' broke out Geraldine, giving a look to Prince Florizel, 'that we three fellows should have met by the merest accident in so large a wilderness as London, and should be so nearly in the same condition?'

‘How?’ cried the young man. ‘Are you, too, ruined? Is this supper a folly like my cream tarts? Has the devil brought three of his own together for a last carouse?’

‘The devil, depend upon it, can sometimes do a very gentlemanly thing,’ returned Prince Florizel; ‘and I am so much touched by this coincidence, that, although we are not entirely in the same case, I am going to put an end to the disparity. Let your heroic treatment of the last cream tarts be my example.’

So saying, the Prince drew out his purse and took from it a small bundle of bank-notes.

‘You see, I was a week or so behind you, but I mean to catch you up and come neck and neck into the winning-post,’ he continued. ‘This,’ laying one of the notes upon the table, ‘will suffice for the bill. As for the rest—’

He tossed them into the fire, and they went up the chimney in a single blaze.

The young man tried to catch his arm, but as the table was between them his interference came too late.

‘Unhappy man,’ he cried, ‘you should not have burned them all! You should have kept forty pounds.’

‘Forty pounds!’ repeated the Prince. ‘Why, in Heaven’s name, forty pounds?’

‘Why not eighty?’ cried the Colonel; ‘for to my certain knowledge there must have been a hundred in the bundle.’

‘It was only forty pounds he needed,’ said the young man gloomily. ‘But without them there is no admission. The rule is strict. Forty pounds for each. Accursed life, where a man cannot even die without money!’

The Prince and the Colonel exchanged glances.

‘Explain yourself,’ said the latter. ‘I have still a pocket-book tolerably well lined, and I need not say how readily I would share my wealth with Godall. But I must know to what end: you must certainly tell us what you mean.’

The young man seemed to awaken; he looked uneasily from one to the other, and his face flushed deeply.

‘You are not fooling me?’ he asked. ‘You are indeed ruined men like me?’

‘Indeed, I am for my part,’ replied the Colonel.

‘And for mine,’ said the Prince, ‘I have given you proof. Who but a ruined man would throw his notes into the fire? The action speaks for itself.’

‘A ruined man – yes,’ returned the other suspiciously, ‘or else a millionaire.’

‘Enough, sir,’ said the Prince; ‘I have said so, and I am not accustomed to have my word remain in doubt.’

‘Ruined?’ said the young man. ‘Are you ruined, like me? Are you, after a life of indulgence, come to such a pass that you can only indulge yourself in one thing more? Are you’ – he kept lowering his voice as he went on – ‘are you going to give yourselves that last indulgence! Are you going to avoid the consequences of your folly by the one infallible and easy path? Are you going to give the slip to the sheriffs officers of conscience by the one open door?’

Suddenly he broke off and attempted to laugh.

‘Here is your health!’ he cried, emptying his glass, ‘and good night to you, my merry ruined men.’

Colonel Geraldine caught him by the arm as he was about to rise.

‘You lack confidence in us,’ he said, ‘and you are wrong. To all your questions I make answer in the affirmative. But I am not so timid, and can speak the Queen’s English plainly. We too, like yourself, have had enough of life, and are determined to die. Sooner or later, alone or together, we meant to seek out death and beard him where he lies ready. Since we have met you, and your case is more pressing, let it be to-night – and at once – and, if you will, all three together. Such a penniless trio,’ he cried, ‘should go arm in arm into the halls of Pluto, and give each other some countenance among the shades!’

Geraldine had hit exactly on the manners and intonations that became the part he was playing. The Prince himself was disturbed, and looked over at his confidant with a shade of doubt. As for the young man, the flush came back darkly into his cheek, and his eyes threw out a spark of light.

‘You are the men for me!’ he cried, with an almost terrible gayety. ‘Shake hands upon the bargain!’ (his hand was cold and wet.) ‘You little know in what a company you will begin the march! You little know in what a happy moment for yourselves you partook of my cream tarts! I am only a unit, but I am a unit in an army. I know Death’s private door. I am one of his

familiars, and can show you into eternity without ceremony and yet without scandal.'

They called upon him eagerly to explain his meaning.

'Can you muster eighty pounds between you?' he demanded.

Geraldine ostentatiously consulted his pocket-book, and replied in the affirmative.

'Fortunate beings!' cried the young man. 'Forty pounds is the entry money of the Suicide Club.'

'The Suicide Club,' said the Prince, 'why, what the devil is that?'

'Listen,' said the young man; 'this is the age of conveniences, and I have to tell you of the last perfection of the sort. We have affairs in different places; and hence railways were invented. Railways separated us infallibly from our friends; and so telegraphs were made that we might communicate speedily at great distances. Even in hotels we have lifts to spare us a climb of some hundred steps. Now, we know that life is only a stage to play the fool upon as long as the part amuses us. There was one more convenience lacking to modern comfort; a decent, easy way to quit that stage; the back stairs to liberty; or, as I said this moment, Death's private door. This, my two fellow-rebels, is supplied by the Suicide Club. Do not suppose that you and I are alone, or even exceptional, in the highly reasonable desire that we profess. A large number of our fellow-men, who have grown heartily sick of the performance in which they are expected to join daily and all their lives long, are only kept from flight by one or two considerations. Some have families who would be shocked, or even blamed, if the matter became public; others have a weakness at heart and recoil from the circumstances of death. That is, to some extent, my own experience. I cannot put a pistol to my head and draw the trigger; for something stronger than myself withholds the act; and although I loathe life, I have not strength enough in my body to take hold of death and be done with it. For such as I, and for all who desire to be out of the coil without posthumous scandal, the Suicide Club has been inaugurated. How this has been managed, what is its history, or what may be its ramifications in other lands, I am myself uninformed; and what I know of its constitution, I am not at liberty to communicate to you. To this extent, however, I am at your service. If you are truly tired of life, I will introduce you to-night to a meeting; and if not to-night, at least some time within the week, you will be easily relieved of your existences. It is now

(consulting his watch) eleven; by half-past, at latest, we must leave this place; so that you have half an hour before you to consider my proposal. It is more serious than a cream tart,' he added, with a smile; 'and I suspect more palatable.'

'More serious, certainly,' returned Colonel Geraldine; 'and as it is so much more so, will you allow me five minutes' speech in private with my friend, Mr Godall?'

'It is only fair,' answered the young man. 'If you will permit, I will retire.'

'You will be very obliging,' said the Colonel.

As soon as the two were alone – 'What,' said Prince Florizel, 'is the use of this confabulation, Geraldine? I see you are flurried, whereas my mind is very tranquilly made up. I will see the end of this.'

'Your Highness,' said the Colonel turning pale; 'let me ask you to consider the importance of your life, not only to your friends, but to the public interest. "If not tonight," said this madman; but supposing that to-night some irreparable disaster were to overtake your Highness's person, what, let me ask you, what would be my despair, and what the concern and disaster of a great nation?'

'I will see the end of this,' repeated the Prince in his most deliberate tones; 'and have the kindness, Colonel Geraldine, to remember and respect your word of honour as a gentleman. Under no circumstances, recollect, nor without my special authority, are you to betray the incognito under which I choose to go abroad. These were my commands, which I now reiterate. And now,' he added, 'let me ask you to call for the bill.'

Colonel Geraldine bowed in submission; but he had a very white face as he summoned the young man of the cream tarts, and issued his directions to the waiter. The Prince preserved his undisturbed demeanor, and described a Palais Royal farce to the young suicide with great humour and gusto. He avoided the Colonel's appealing looks without ostentation, and selected another cheroot with more than usual care. Indeed, he was now the only man of the party who kept any command over his nerves.

The bill was discharged, the Prince giving the whole change of the note to the astonished waiter; and the three drove off in a four wheeler. They were not long upon the way before the cab stopped at the entrance to a rather dark court. Here all descended.

After Geraldine had paid the fare, the young man turned, and addressed Prince Florizel as follows:

‘It is still time, Mr Godall, to make good your escape into thralldom. And for you too, Major Hammersmith. Reflect well before you take another step; and if your hearts say no – here are the crossroads.’

‘Lead on, sir,’ said the Prince. ‘I am not the man to go back from a thing once said.’

‘Your coolness does me good,’ replied their guide. ‘I have never seen anyone so unmoved at this conjuncture; and yet you are not the first whom I have escorted to this door. More than one of my friends has preceded me, where I knew I must shortly follow. But this is of no interest to you. Wait me here for only a few moments; I shall return as soon as I have arranged the preliminaries of your introduction.’

And with that the young man, waving his hand to his companions, turned into the court, entered a doorway and disappeared.

‘Of all our follies,’ said Colonel Geraldine in a low voice, ‘this is the wildest and most dangerous.’

‘I perfectly believe so,’ returned the Prince.

‘We have still,’ pursued the Colonel, ‘a moment to ourselves. Let me beseech your Highness to profit by the opportunity and retire. The consequences of this step are so dark, and may be so grave, that I feel myself justified in pushing a little farther than usual the liberty which your Highness is so condescending as to allow me in private.’

‘Am I to understand that Colonel Geraldine is afraid?’ asked his Highness, taking his cheroot from his lips, and looking keenly into the other’s face.

‘My fear is certainly not personal,’ replied the other proudly; ‘of that your Highness may rest well assured.’

‘I had supposed as much,’ returned the Prince, with undisturbed good humour; ‘but I was unwilling to remind you of the difference in our stations. No more – no more,’ he added, seeing Geraldine about to apologize, ‘you stand excused.’

And he smoked placidly, leaning against a railing, until the young man returned.

‘Well,’ he asked, ‘has our reception been arranged?’

‘Follow me,’ was the reply. ‘The President will see you in the cabinet. And let me warn you to be frank in your answers. I have stood your guarantee; but the club requires a searching inquiry before admission; for the indiscretion of a single member would lead to the dispersion of the whole society forever.’

The Prince and Geraldine put their heads together for a moment. ‘Bear me out in this,’ said the one; and ‘bear me out in that,’ said the other; and by boldly taking up the characters of men with whom both were acquainted, they had come to an agreement in a twinkling, and were ready to follow their guide into the President’s cabinet.

There were no formidable obstacles to pass. The outer door stood open; the door of the cabinet was ajar; and there, in a small but very high apartment, the young man left them once more.

‘He will be here immediately,’ he said with a nod, as he disappeared.

Voices were audible in the cabinet through the folding doors which formed one end; and now and then the noise of a champagne cork, followed by a burst of laughter, intervened among the sounds of conversation. A single tall window looked out upon the river and the embankment; and by the disposition of the lights they judged themselves not far from Charing Cross station. The furniture was scanty, and the coverings worn to the thread; and there was nothing movable except a handbell in the centre of a round table, and the hats and coats of a considerable party hung round the wall on pegs.

‘What sort of a den is this?’ said Geraldine.

‘That is what I have come to see,’ replied the Prince. ‘If they keep live devils on the premises, the thing may grow amusing.’

Just then the folding door was opened no more than necessary for the passage of a human body; and there entered at the same moment a louder buzz of talk, and the redoubtable President of the Suicide Club. The President was a man of fifty or upwards; large and rambling in his gait, with shaggy side-whiskers, a bald top to his head, and a veiled gray eye, which now and then emitted a twinkle. His mouth, which embraced a large cigar, he kept continually screwing round and round and from side to side, as he looked sagaciously and coldly at the strangers. He was dressed in light tweeds, with his neck very open, in a striped shirt collar; and carried a minute book under one arm.

‘Good evening,’ said he, after he had closed the door behind him. ‘I am told you wish to speak with me.’

‘We have a desire, sir, to join the Suicide Club,’ replied the Colonel.

The President rolled his cigar about in his mouth.

‘What is that?’ he said abruptly.

‘Pardon me,’ returned the Colonel, ‘but I believe you are the person best qualified to give us information on that point.’

‘I?’ cried the President. ‘A Suicide Club? Come, come! this is a frolic for All Fools’ Day. I can make allowances for gentlemen who get merry in their liquor; but let there be an end to this.’

‘Call your Club what you will,’ said the Colonel, ‘you have some company behind these doors, and we insist on joining it.’

‘Sir,’ returned the President, curtly, ‘you have made a mistake. This is a private house, and you must leave it instantly.’

The Prince had remained quietly in his seat throughout this little colloquy; but now, when the Colonel looked over to him, as much as to say, ‘Take your answer and come away, for God’s sake!’ he drew his cheroot from his mouth, and spoke—

‘I have come here,’ said he, ‘upon the invitation of a friend of yours. He has doubtless informed you of my intention in thus intruding on your party. Let me remind you that a person in my circumstances has exceedingly little to bind him, and is not at all likely to tolerate much rudeness. I am a very quiet man, as a usual thing; but, my dear sir, you are either going to oblige me in the little matter of which you are aware, or you shall very bitterly repent that you ever admitted me to your ante-chamber.’

The President laughed aloud.

‘That is the way to speak,’ said he. ‘You are a man who is a man. You know the way to my heart, and can do what you like with me. Will you,’ he continued, addressing Geraldine, ‘will you step aside for a few minutes? I shall finish first with your companion, and some of the club’s formalities require to be fulfilled in private.’

With these words he opened the door of a small closet, into which he shut the Colonel.

‘I believe in you,’ he said to Florizel, as soon as they were alone; ‘but are you sure of your friend?’

‘Not so sure as I am of myself, though he has more cogent reasons,’ answered Florizel, ‘but sure enough to bring him here without alarm. He has had enough to cure the most tenacious man of life. He was cashiered the other day for cheating at cards.’

‘A good reason, I daresay,’ replied the President; ‘at least, we have another in the same case, and I feel sure of him. Have you also been in the Service, may I ask?’

‘I have,’ was the reply; ‘but I was too lazy, I left it early.’

‘What is your reason for being tired of life?’ pursued the President.

‘The same, as near as I can make out,’ answered the Prince; ‘unadulterated laziness.’

The President started. ‘D—n it,’ said he, ‘you must have something better than that.’

‘I have no more money,’ added Florizel. ‘That is also a vexation, without doubt. It brings my sense of idleness to an acute point.’

The President rolled his cigar round in his mouth for some seconds, directing his gaze straight into the eyes of this unusual neophyte; but the Prince supported his scrutiny with unabashed good temper.

‘If I had not a deal of experience,’ said the President at last, ‘I should turn you off. But I know the world; and this much any way, that the most frivolous excuses for a suicide are often the toughest to stand by. And when I downright like a man, as I do you, sir, I would rather strain the regulation than deny him.’

The Prince and the Colonel, one after the other, were subjected to a long and particular interrogatory: the Prince alone; but Geraldine in the presence of the Prince, so that the President might observe the countenance of the one while the other was being warmly cross-examined. The result was satisfactory; and the President, after having booked a few details of each case, produced a form of oath to be accepted. Nothing could be conceived more passive than the obedience promised, or more stringent than the terms by which the juror bound himself. The man who forfeited a pledge so awful could scarcely have a rag of honour or any of the consolations of religion left to him. Florizel signed the document, but not without a shudder; the Colonel followed his example with an air of great depression. Then the President received the entry money; and without more ado, introduced the two friends into the smoking-room of the Suicide Club.

The smoking-room of the Suicide Club was the same height as the cabinet into which it opened, but much larger, and papered from top to bottom with an imitation of oak wainscot. A large and cheerful fire and a number of gas-jets illuminated the company. The Prince and his follower made the number up to eighteen. Most of the party were smoking, and drinking champagne; a feverish hilarity reigned, with sudden and rather ghastly pauses.

‘Is this a full meeting?’ asked the Prince.

‘Middling,’ said the President. ‘By the way,’ he added, ‘if you have any money, it is usual to offer some champagne. It keeps up a good spirit, and is one of my own little perquisites.’

‘Hammersmith,’ said Florizel, ‘I may leave the champagne to you.’

And with that he turned away and began to go round among the guests. Accustomed to play the host in the highest circles, he charmed and dominated all whom he approached; there was something at once winning and authoritative in his address; and his extraordinary coolness gave him yet another distinction in this half maniacal society. As he went from one to another he kept both his eyes and ears open, and soon began to gain a general idea of the people among whom he found himself. As in all other places of resort, one type predominated: people in the prime of youth, with every show of intelligence and sensibility in their appearance, but with little promise of strength or the quality that makes success. Few were much above thirty, and not a few were still in their teens. They stood, leaning on tables and shifting on their feet; sometimes they smoked extraordinarily fast, and sometimes they let their cigars go out; some talked well, but the conversation of others was plainly the result of nervous tension, and was equally without wit or purport. As each new bottle of champagne was opened, there was a manifest improvement in gaiety. Only two were seated – one in a chair in the recess of the window, with his head hanging and his hands plunged deep into his trouser pockets, pale, visibly moist with perspiration, saying never a word, a very wreck of soul and body; the other sat on the divan close by the chimney, and attracted notice by a trenchant dissimilarity from all the rest. He was probably upwards of forty, but he looked fully ten years older; and Florizel thought he had never seen a man more naturally hideous, nor one more ravaged by disease and ruinous excitements. He was no more than skin and bone, was partly paralyzed, and

wore spectacles of such unusual power, that his eyes appeared through the glasses greatly magnified and distorted in shape. Except the Prince and the President, he was the only person in the room who preserved the composure of ordinary life.

There was little decency among the members of the club. Some boasted of the disgraceful actions, the consequences of which had reduced them to seek refuge in death; and the others listened without disapproval. There was a tacit understanding against moral judgments; and whoever passed the club doors enjoyed already some of the immunities of the tomb. They drank to each other's memories, and to those of notable suicides in the past. They compared and developed their different views of death – some declaring that it was no more than blackness and cessation; others full of a hope that that very night they should be scaling the stars and commercing with the mighty dead.

'To the eternal memory of Baron Trenck, the type of suicides!' cried one. 'He went out of a small cell into a smaller, that he might come forth again to freedom.'

'For my part,' said a second, 'I wish no more than a bandage for my eyes and cotton for my ears. Only they have no cotton thick enough in this world.'

A third was for reading the mysteries of life in a future state; and a fourth professed that he would never have joined the club, if he had not been induced to believe in Mr Darwin.

'I could not bear,' said this remarkable suicide, 'to be descended from an ape.'

Altogether, the Prince was disappointed by the bearing and conversation of the members.

'It does not seem to me,' he thought, 'a matter for so much disturbance. If a man has made up his mind to kill himself, let him do it, in God's name, like a gentleman. This flutter and big talk is out of place.'

In the meanwhile Colonel Geraldine was a prey to the blackest apprehensions; the club and its rules were still a mystery, and he looked round the room for some one who should be able to set his mind at rest. In this survey his eye lighted on the paralytic person with the strong spectacles; and seeing him so exceedingly tranquil, he besought the

President, who was going in and out of the room under a pressure of business, to present him to the gentleman on the divan.

The functionary explained the needlessness of all such formalities within the club, but nevertheless presented Mr Hammersmith to Mr Malthus.

Mr Malthus looked at the Colonel curiously, and then requested him to take a seat upon his right.

‘You are a newcomer,’ he said, ‘and wish information? You have come to the proper source. It is two years since I first visited this charming club.’

The Colonel breathed again. If Mr Malthus had frequented the place for two years there could be little danger for the Prince in a single evening. But Geraldine was none the less astonished, and began to suspect a mystification.

‘What!’ cried he, ‘two years! I thought – but indeed I see I have been made the subject of a pleasantry.’

‘By no means,’ replied Mr Malthus mildly. ‘My case is peculiar. I am not, properly speaking, a suicide at all; but, as it were, an honourary member. I rarely visit the club twice in two months. My infirmity and the kindness of the President have procured me these little immunities, for which besides I pay at an advanced rate. Even as it is my luck has been extraordinary.’

‘I am afraid,’ said the Colonel, ‘that I must ask you to be more explicit. You must remember that I am still most imperfectly acquainted with the rules of the club.’

‘An ordinary member who comes here in search of death like yourself,’ replied the paralytic, ‘returns every evening until fortune favours him. He can, even if he is penniless, get board and lodging from the President: very fair, I believe, and clean, although, of course, not luxurious; that could hardly be, considering the exiguity (if I may so express myself) of the subscription. And then the President’s company is a delicacy in itself.’

‘Indeed!’ cried Geraldine, ‘he had not greatly prepossessed me.’

‘Ah!’ said Mr Malthus, ‘you do not know the man: the drollest fellow! What stories! What cynicism! He knows life to admiration and, between ourselves, is probably the most corrupt rogue in Christendom.’

‘And he also,’ asked the Colonel, ‘is a permanency – like yourself, if I may say so without offence?’

‘Indeed, he is a permanency in a very different sense from me,’ replied Mr Malthus. ‘I have been graciously spared, but I must go at last. Now he

never plays. He shuffles and deals for the club, and makes the necessary arrangements. That man, my dear Mr Hammersmith, is the very soul of ingenuity. For three years he has pursued in London his useful and, I think I may add, his artistic calling; and not so much as a whisper of suspicion has been once aroused. I believe him myself to be inspired. You doubtless remember the celebrated case, six months ago, of the gentleman who was accidentally poisoned in a chemist's shop? That was one of the least rich, one of the least racy, of his notions; but then, how simple! and how safe!'

'You astound me,' said the Colonel. 'Was that unfortunate gentleman one of the—' He was about to say 'victims'; but bethinking himself in time, he substituted – 'members of the club?'

In the same flash of thought, it occurred to him that Mr Malthus himself had not at all spoken in the tone of one who is in love with death; and he added hurriedly:

'But I perceive I am still in the dark. You speak of shuffling and dealing; pray for what end? And since you seem rather unwilling to die than otherwise, I must own that I cannot conceive what brings you here at all.'

'You say truly that you are in the dark,' replied Mr Malthus with more animation. 'Why, my dear sir, this club is the temple of intoxication. If my enfeebled health could support the excitement more often, you may depend upon it I should be more often here. It requires all the sense of duty engendered by a long habit of ill-health and careful regimen, to keep me from excess in this, which is, I may say, my last dissipation. I have tried them all, sir,' he went on, laying his hand on Geraldine's arm, 'all without exception, and I declare to you, upon my honour, there is not one of them that has not been grossly and untruthfully overrated. People trifle with love. Now, I deny that love is a strong passion. Fear is the strong passion; it is with fear that you must trifle, if you wish to taste the intense joys of living. Envy me – envy me, sir,' he added with a chuckle, 'I am a coward!'

Geraldine could scarcely repress a movement of repulsion for this deplorable wretch; but he commanded himself with an effort, and continued his inquiries.

'How, sir,' he asked, 'is the excitement so artfully prolonged? and where is there any element of uncertainty?'

'I must tell you how the victim for every evening is selected,' returned Mr Malthus; 'and not only the victim, but another member, who is to be the

instrument in the club's hands, and death's high priest of that occasion.'

'Good God!' said the Colonel, 'do they then kill each other?'

'The trouble of suicide is removed in that way,' returned Malthus with a nod.

'Merciful Heavens!' ejaculated the Colonel, 'and may you – may I – may the – my friend, I mean – may any of us be pitched upon this evening as the slayer of another man's body and immortal spirit? Can such things be possible among men born of women? Oh! infamy of infamies!'

He was about to rise in his horror, when he caught the Prince's eye. It was fixed upon him from across the room with a frowning and angry stare. And in a moment Geraldine recovered his composure.

'After all,' he added, 'why not? And since you say the game is interesting, *vogue la galère* – I follow the club!'

Mr Malthus had keenly enjoyed the Colonel's amazement and disgust. He had the vanity of wickedness; and it pleased him to see another man give way to a generous movement, while he felt himself, in his entire corruption, superior to such emotions.

'You now, after your first moment of surprise,' said he, 'are in a position to appreciate the delights of our society. You can see how it combines the excitement of a gaming-table, a duel, and a Roman amphitheatre. The Pagans did well enough; I cordially admire the refinement of their minds; but it has been reserved for a Christian country to attain this extreme, this quintessence, this absolute of poignancy. You will understand how vapid are all amusements to a man who has acquired a taste for this one. The game we play,' he continued, 'is one of extreme simplicity. A full pack – but I perceive you are about to see the thing in progress. Will you lend me the help of your arm? I am unfortunately paralyzed.'

Indeed, just as Mr Malthus was beginning his description, another pair of folding-doors was thrown open, and the whole club began to pass, not without some hurry, into the adjoining room. It was similar in every respect to the one from which it was entered, but somewhat differently furnished. The centre was occupied by a long green table, at which the President sat shuffling a pack of cards with great particularity. Even with the stick and the Colonel's arm, Mr Malthus walked with so much difficulty that everyone was seated before this pair and the Prince, who had waited for

them, entered the apartment; and, in consequence, the three took seats close together at the lower end of the board.

‘It is a pack of fifty-two,’ whispered Mr Malthus. ‘Watch for the ace of spades, which is the sign of death, and the ace of clubs, which designates the official of the night. Happy, happy young men!’ he added. ‘You have good eyes, and can follow the game. Alas! I cannot tell an ace from a deuce across the table.’

And he proceeded to equip himself with a second pair of spectacles.

‘I must at least watch the faces,’ he explained.

The Colonel rapidly informed his friend of all that he had learned from the honourary member, and of the horrible alternative that lay before them. The Prince was conscious of a deadly chill and a contraction about his heart; he swallowed with difficulty, and looked from side to side like a man in a maze.

‘One bold stroke,’ whispered the Colonel, ‘and we may still escape.’

But the suggestion recalled the Prince’s spirits.

‘Silence!’ said he. ‘Let me see that you can play like a gentleman for any stake, however serious.’

And he looked about him, once more to all appearance at his ease, although his heart beat thickly, and he was conscious of an unpleasant heat in his bosom. The members were all very quiet and intent; everyone was pale, but none so pale as Mr Malthus. His eyes protruded; his head kept nodding involuntarily upon his spine; his hands found their way, one after the other, to his mouth, where they made clutches at his tremulous and ashen lips. It was plain that the honourary member enjoyed his membership on very startling terms.

‘Attention, gentlemen!’ said the President.

And he began slowly dealing the cards about the table in the reverse direction, pausing until each man had shown his card. Nearly everyone hesitated; and sometimes you would see a player’s fingers stumble more than once before he could turn over the momentous slip of pasteboard. As the Prince’s turn drew nearer, he was conscious of a growing and almost suffocating excitement; but he had somewhat of the gambler’s nature, and recognized almost with astonishment that there was a degree of pleasure in his sensations. The nine of clubs fell to his lot; the three of spades was dealt to Geraldine; and the queen of hearts to Mr Malthus, who was unable to

suppress a sob of relief. The young man of the cream tarts almost immediately afterwards turned over the ace of clubs, and remained frozen with horror, the card still resting on his finger; he had not come there to kill, but to be killed; and the Prince, in his generous sympathy with his position, almost forgot the peril that still hung over himself and his friend.

The deal was coming round again, and still Death's card had not come out. The players held their respiration, and only breathed by gasps. The Prince received another club; Geraldine had a diamond; but when Mr Malthus turned up his card a horrible noise, like that of something breaking, issued from his mouth; and he rose from his seat and sat down again, with no sign of his paralysis. It was the ace of spades. The honourary member had trifled once too often with his terrors.

Conversation broke out again almost at once. The players relaxed their rigid attitudes, and began to rise from the table and stroll back by twos and threes into the smoking-room. The President stretched his arms and yawned, like a man who had finished his day's work. But Mr Malthus sat in his place, with his head in his hands, and his hands upon the table, drunk and motionless – a thing stricken down.

The Prince and Geraldine made their escape at once. In the cold night air their horror of what they had witnessed was redoubled.

'Alas!' cried the Prince, 'to be bound by an oath in such a matter! to allow this wholesale trade in murder to be continued with profit and impunity! If I but dared to forfeit my pledge!'

'That is impossible for your Highness,' replied the Colonel, 'whose honour is the honour of Bohemia. But I dare, and may with propriety, forfeit mine.'

'Geraldine,' said the Prince, 'if your honour suffers in any of the adventures into which you follow me, not only will I never pardon you, but – what I believe will much more sensibly affect you – I should never forgive myself.'

'I receive your Highness's commands,' replied the Colonel. 'Shall we go from this accursed spot?'

'Yes,' said the Prince. 'Call a cab in Heaven's name, and let me try to forget in slumber the memory of this night's disgrace.'

But it was notable that he carefully read the name of the court before he left it.

The next morning, as soon as the Prince was stirring, Colonel Geraldine brought him a daily newspaper, with the following paragraph marked:—

'MELANCHOLY ACCIDENT.— This morning, about two o'clock, Mr Bartholomew Malthus, of 16 Chepstow Place, Westbourne Grove, on his way home from a party at a friend's house, fell over the upper parapet in Trafalgar Square, fracturing his skull and breaking a leg and an arm. Death was instantaneous. Mr Malthus, accompanied by a friend, was engaged in looking for a cab at the time of the unfortunate occurrence. As Mr Malthus was paralytic, it is thought that his fall may have been occasioned by another seizure. The unhappy gentleman was well known in the most respectable circles, and his loss will be widely and deeply deplored.'

'If ever a soul went straight to Hell,' said Geraldine solemnly, 'it was that paralytic man's.'

The Prince buried his face in his hands, and remained silent.

'I am almost rejoiced,' continued the Colonel, 'to know that he is dead. But for our young man of the cream tarts I confess my heart bleeds.'

'Geraldine,' said the Prince, raising his face, 'that unhappy lad was last night as innocent as you and I; and this morning the guilt of blood is on his soul. When I think of the President, my heart grows sick within me. I do not know how it shall be done, but I shall have that scoundrel at my mercy as there is a God in Heaven. What an experience, what a lesson, was that game of cards!'

'One,' said the Colonel, 'never to be repeated.'

The Prince remained so long without replying, that Geraldine grew alarmed.

'You cannot mean to return,' he said. 'You have suffered too much and seen too much horror already. The duties of your high position forbid the repetition of the hazard.'

'There is much in what you say,' replied Prince Florizel, 'and I am not altogether pleased with my own determination. Alas! in the clothes of the greatest potentate, what is there but a man? I never felt my weakness more acutely than now, Geraldine, but it is stronger than I. Can I cease to interest myself in the fortunes of the unhappy young man who supped with us some hours ago? Can I leave the President to follow his nefarious career unwatched? Can I begin an adventure so entrancing, and not follow it to an

end? No, Geraldine; you ask of the Prince more than, the man is able to perform. Tonight, once more, we take our places at the table of the Suicide Club.'

Colonel Geraldine fell upon his knees.

'Will your Highness take my life?' he cried. 'It is his – his freely; but do not, Oh, do not! let him ask me to countenance so terrible a risk.'

'Colonel Geraldine,' replied the Prince, with some haughtiness of manner, 'your life is absolutely your own. I only looked for obedience; and when that is unwillingly rendered, I shall look for that no longer. I add one word: your importunity in this affair has been sufficient.'

The Master of the Horse regained his feet at once. 'Your Highness,' he said, 'may I be excused in my attendance this afternoon? I dare not, as an honourable man, venture a second time into that fatal house until I have perfectly ordered my affairs. Your Highness shall meet, I promise him, with no more opposition from the most devoted and grateful of his servants.'

'My dear Geraldine,' returned Prince Florizel, 'I always regret when you oblige me to remember my rank. Dispose of your day as you think fit, but be here before eleven in the same disguise.'

The club, on this second evening, was not so fully attended; and when Geraldine and the Prince arrived, there were not above half a dozen persons in the smoking-room. His Highness took the President aside and congratulated him warmly on the demise of Mr Malthus.

'I like,' he said, 'to meet with capacity, and certainly find much of it in you. Your profession is of a very delicate nature, but I see you are well qualified to conduct it with success and secrecy.'

The President was somewhat affected by these compliments from one of his Highness's superior bearing. He acknowledged them almost with humility.

'Poor Malthy!' he added, 'I shall hardly know the club without him. The most of my patrons are boys, sir, and poetical boys, who are not much

company for me. Not but what Malthy had some poetry, too; but it was of a kind that I could understand.'

'I can readily imagine you should find yourself in sympathy with Mr Malthus,' returned the Prince. 'He struck me as a man of a very original disposition.'

The young man of the cream tarts was in the room, but painfully depressed and silent. His late companions sought in vain to lead him into conversation.

'How bitterly I wish,' he cried, 'that I had never brought you to this infamous abode! Begone, while you are clean-handed. If you could have heard the old man scream as he fell, and the noise of his bones upon the pavement! Wish me, if you have any kindness to so fallen a being – wish the ace of spades for me to-night!'

A few more members dropped in as the evening went on, but the club did not muster more than the devil's dozen when they took their places at the table. The Prince was again conscious of a certain joy in his alarms; but he was astonished to see Geraldine so much more self-possessed than on the night before.

'It is extraordinary,' thought the Prince, 'that a will, made or unmade, should so greatly influence a young man's spirit.'

'Attention, gentlemen!' said the President, and he began to deal.

Three times the cards went all round the table, and neither of the marked cards had yet fallen from his hand. The excitement as he began the fourth distribution was overwhelming. There were just cards enough to go once more entirely round. The Prince, who sat second from the dealer's left, would receive, in the reverse mode of dealing practiced at the club, the second last card. The third player turned up a black ace – it was the ace of clubs. The next received a diamond, the next a heart, and so on; but the ace of spades was still undelivered. At last Geraldine, who sat upon the Prince's left, turned his card; it was an ace, but the ace of hearts.

When Prince Florizel saw his fate upon the table in front of him, his heart stood still. He was a brave man, but the sweat poured off his face. There were exactly fifty chances out of a hundred that he was doomed. He reversed the card; it was the ace of spades. A loud roaring filled his brain, and the table swam before his eyes. He heard the player on his right break into a fit of laughter that sounded between mirth and disappointment; he

saw the company rapidly dispersing, but his mind was full of other thoughts. He recognized how foolish, how criminal, had been his conduct. In perfect health, in the prime of his years, the heir to a throne, he had gambled away his future and that of a brave and loyal country. ‘God,’ he cried, ‘God forgive me!’ And with that, the confusion of his senses passed away, and he regained his self-possession in a moment.

To his surprise Geraldine had disappeared. There was no one in the card-room but his destined butcher consulting with the President, and the young man of the cream tarts, who slipped up to the Prince and whispered in his ear:

‘I would give a million, if I had it, for your luck.’

His Highness could not help reflecting, as the young man departed, that he would have sold his opportunity for a much more moderate sum.

The whispered conference now came to an end. The holder of the ace of clubs left the room with a look of intelligence, and the President, approaching the unfortunate Prince, proffered him his hand.

‘I am pleased to have met you, sir,’ said he, ‘and pleased to have been in a position to do you this trifling service. At least, you cannot complain of delay. On the second evening – what a stroke of luck!’

The Prince endeavored in vain to articulate something in response, but his mouth was dry and his tongue seemed paralyzed.

‘You feel a little sickish?’ asked the President, with some show of solicitude. ‘Most gentlemen do. Will you take a little brandy?’

The Prince signified in the affirmative, and the other immediately filled some of the spirit into a tumbler.

‘Poor old Malthy!’ ejaculated the President, as the Prince drained the glass. ‘He drank near upon a pint, and little enough good it seemed to do him!’

‘I am more amenable to treatment,’ said the Prince, a good deal revived. ‘I am my own man again at once, as you perceive. And so, let me ask you, what are my directions?’

‘You will proceed along the Strand in the direction of the City, and on the left-hand pavement, until you meet the gentleman who has just left the room. He will continue your instructions, and him you will have the kindness to obey; the authority of the club is vested in his person for the night. And now,’ added the President, ‘I wish you a pleasant walk.’

Florizel acknowledged the salutation rather awkwardly, and took his leave. He passed through the smoking-room, where the bulk of the players were still consuming champagne, some of which he had himself ordered and paid for; and he was surprised to find himself cursing them in his heart. He put on his hat and great coat in the cabinet, and selected his umbrella from a corner. The familiarity of these acts, and the thought that he was about them for the last time, betrayed him into a fit of laughter which sounded unpleasantly in his own ears. He conceived a reluctance to leave the cabinet, and turned instead to the window. The sight of the lamps and the darkness recalled him to himself.

'Come, come, I must be a man,' he thought, 'and tear myself away.'

At the corner of Box Court three men fell upon Prince Florizel and he was unceremoniously thrust into a carriage, which at once drove rapidly away. There was already an occupant.

'Will your Highness pardon my zeal?' said a well-known voice.

The Prince threw himself upon the Colonel's neck in a passion of relief.

'How can I ever thank you?' he cried. 'And how was this effected?'

Although he had been willing to march upon his doom, he was overjoyed to yield to friendly violence, and return once more to life and hope.

'You can thank me effectually enough,' replied the Colonel, 'by avoiding all such dangers in the future. And as for your second question, all has been managed by the simplest means. I arranged this afternoon with a celebrated detective. Secrecy has been promised and paid for. Your own servants have been principally engaged in the affair. The house in Box Court has been surrounded since nightfall, and this, which is one of your own carriages, has been awaiting you for nearly an hour.'

'And the miserable creature who was to have slain me – what of him?' inquired the Prince.

'He was pinioned as he left the club,' replied the Colonel, 'and now awaits your sentence at the Palace, where he will soon be joined by his accomplices.'

'Geraldine,' said the Prince, 'you have saved me against my explicit orders, and you have done well. I owe you not only my life, but a lesson; and I should be unworthy of my rank if I did not show myself grateful to my teacher. Let it be yours to choose the manner.'

There was a pause, during which the carriage continued to speed through the streets, and the two men were each buried in his own reflections. The silence was broken by Colonel Geraldine.

‘Your Highness,’ said he, ‘has by this time a considerable body of prisoners. There is at least one criminal among the number to whom justice should be dealt. Our oath forbids us all recourse to law; and discretion would forbid it equally if the oath were loosened. May I inquire your Highness’s intention?’

‘It is decided,’ answered Florizel; ‘the President must fall in duel. It only remains to choose his adversary.’

‘Your Highness has permitted me to name my own recompense,’ said the Colonel. ‘Will he permit me to ask the appointment of my brother? It is an honourable post, but I dare assure your Highness that the lad will acquit himself with credit.’

‘You ask me an ungracious favour,’ said the Prince, ‘but I must refuse you nothing.’

The Colonel kissed his hand with the greatest affection; and at that moment the carriage rolled under the archway of the Prince’s splendid residence.

An hour after, Florizel in his official robes, and covered with all the orders of Bohemia, received the members of the Suicide Club.

‘Foolish and wicked men,’ said he, ‘as many of you as have been driven into this strait by the lack of fortune shall receive employment and remuneration from my officers. Those who suffer under a sense of guilt must have recourse to a higher and more generous Potentate than I. I feel pity for all of you, deeper than you can imagine; to-morrow you shall tell me your stories; and as you answer more frankly, I shall be the more able to remedy your misfortunes. As for you,’ he added, turning to the President, ‘I should only offend a person of your parts by any offer of assistance; but I have instead a piece of diversion to propose to you. Here,’ laying his hand on the shoulder of Colonel Geraldine’s young brother, ‘is an officer of mine who desires to make a little tour upon the Continent; and I ask you, as a favour, to accompany him on this excursion. Do you,’ he went on, changing his tone, ‘do you shoot well with the pistol? Because you may have need of that accomplishment. When two men go traveling together, it is best to be prepared for all. Let me add that, if by any chance you should lose young

Mr Geraldine upon the way, I shall always have another member of my household to place at your disposal; and I am known, Mr President, to have long eyesight, and as long an arm.'

With these words, said with much sternness, the Prince concluded his address. Next morning the members of the club were suitably provided for by his munificence, and the President set forth upon his travels, under the supervision of Mr Geraldine, and a pair of faithful and adroit lackeys, well trained in the Prince's household. Not content with this, discreet agents were put in possession of the house of Box Court, and all letters of visitors for the Suicide Club or its officials were to be examined by Prince Florizel in person.

Here (says my Arabian author) *ends the* STORY OF THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE CREAM TARTS, *who is now a comfortable householder in Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square. The number, for obvious reasons, I suppress. Those who care to pursue the adventures of Prince Florizel and the President of the Suicide Club, may read the* STORY OF THE PHYSICIAN AND THE SARATOGA TRUNK.

Story of the Physician and the Saratoga Trunk

Mr Silas Q. Scuddamore was a young American of a simple and harmless disposition, which was the more to his credit as he came from New England – a quarter of the New World not precisely famous for those qualities. Although he was exceedingly rich, he kept a note of all his expenses in a little paper pocket-book; and he had chosen to study the attractions of Paris from the seventh story of what is called a furnished hotel, in the Latin Quarter. There was a great deal of habit in his penuriousness; and his virtue, which was very remarkable among his associates, was principally founded upon diffidence and youth.

The next room to his was inhabited by a lady, very attractive in her air and very elegant in toilette, whom, on his first arrival, he had taken for a Countess. In course of time he had learned that she was known by the name of Madame Zéphyrine, and that whatever station she occupied in life it was not that of a person of title. Madame Zéphyrine, probably in the hope of enchanting the young American, used to flaunt by him on the stairs with a civil inclination, a word of course, and a knock-down look out of her black eyes, and disappear in a rustle of silk, and with the revelation of an admirable foot and ankle. But these advances, so far from encouraging Mr Scuddamore, plunged him into the depths of depression and bashfulness. She had come to him several times for a light, or to apologize for the imaginary depredations of her poodle, but his mouth was closed in the presence of so superior a being, his French promptly left him, and he could only stare and stammer until she was gone. The slenderness of their intercourse did not prevent him from throwing out insinuations of a very glorious order when he was safely alone with a few males.

The room on the other side of the American's – for there were three rooms on a floor in the hotel – was tenanted by an old English physician of rather doubtful reputation. Dr Noel, for that was his name, had been forced

to leave London, where he enjoyed a large and increasing practice; and it was hinted that the police had been the instigators of this change of scene. At least he, who had made something of a figure in earlier life, now dwelt in the Latin Quarter in great simplicity and solitude, and devoted much of his time to study. Mr Scuddamore had made his acquaintance, and the pair would now and then dine together frugally in a restaurant across the street.

Silas Q. Scuddamore had many little vices of the more respectable order, and was not restrained by delicacy from indulging them in many rather doubtful ways. Chief among his foibles stood curiosity. He was a born gossip; and life, and especially those parts of it in which he had no experience, interested him to the degree of passion. He was a pert, invincible questioner, pushing his inquiries with equal pertinacity and indiscretion; he had been observed, when he took a letter to the post, to weigh it in his hand, to turn it over and over, and to study the address with care; and when he found a flaw in the partition between his room and Madame Zéphyrine's, instead of filling it up, he enlarged and improved the opening, and made use of it as a spy-hole on his neighbor's affairs.

One day, in the end of March, his curiosity grew as it was indulged and he enlarged the hole a little further, so that he might command another corner of the room. That evening, when he went as usual to inspect Madame Zéphyrine's movements, he was astonished to find the aperture obscured in an odd manner on the other side, and still more abashed when the obstacle was suddenly withdrawn and a titter of laughter reached his ears. Some of the plaster had evidently betrayed the secret of his spyhole, and his neighbor had been returning the compliment in kind. Mr Scuddamore was moved to a very acute feeling of annoyance; he condemned Madame Zephyrine unmercifully; he even blamed himself; but when he found, next day, that she had taken no means to baulk him of his favourite pastime, he continued to profit by her carelessness, and gratify his idle curiosity.

That next day Madame Zéphyrine received a long visit from a tall, loosely-built man of fifty or upwards, whom Silas had not hitherto seen. His tweed suit and colored shirt, no less than his shaggy side-whiskers, identified him as a Britisher, and his dull gray eye affected Silas with a sense of cold. He kept screwing his mouth from side to side and round and round during the whole colloquy, which was carried on in whispers. More

than once it seemed to the young New Englander as if their gestures indicated his own apartment; but the only thing definite he could gather by the most scrupulous attention was this remark made by the Englishman in a somewhat higher key, as if in answer to some reluctance or opposition.

'I have studied his taste to a nicety, and I tell you again and again you are the only woman of the sort that I can lay my hands on.'

In answer to this, Madame Zéphyrine sighed, and appeared by a gesture to resign herself, like one yielding to unqualified authority.

That afternoon the observatory was finally blinded, a wardrobe having been drawn in front of it upon the other side, and while Silas was still lamenting over this misfortune, which he attributed to the Britisher's malign suggestion, the concierge brought him up a letter in a female handwriting. It was conceived in French of no very rigorous orthography, bore no signature, and in the most encouraging terms invited the young American to be present in a certain part of the Bullier Ball at eleven o'clock that night. Curiosity and timidity fought a long battle in his heart; sometimes he was all virtue, sometimes all fire and daring; and the result of it was that, long before ten, Mr Silas Q. Scuddamore presented himself in unimpeachable attire at the door of the Bullier Ball Rooms, and paid his entry money with a sense of reckless deviltry that was not without its charm.

It was Carnival time, and the Ball was very full and noisy. The lights and the crowd at first rather abashed our young adventurer, and then, mounting to his brain with a sort of intoxication, put him in possession of more than his own share of manhood. He felt ready to face the devil, and strutted in the ballroom with the swagger of a cavalier. While he was thus parading, he became aware of Madame Zéphyrine and her Britisher in conference behind a pillar. The cat-like spirit of eavesdropping overcame him at once. He stole nearer and nearer on the couple from behind, until he was within earshot.

'That is the man,' the Britisher was saying; 'there – with the long blond hair – speaking to a girl in green.'

Silas identified a very handsome young fellow of small stature, who was plainly the object of this designation.

'It is well,' said Madame Zéphyrine. 'I shall do my utmost. But, remember, the best of us may fail in such a matter.'

'Tut!' returned her companion; 'I answer for the result. Have I not chosen you from thirty? Go; but be wary of the Prince. I cannot think what cursed

accident has brought him here to-night. As if there were not a dozen balls in Paris better worth his notice than this riot of students and counter-jumpers! See him where he sits, more like a reigning Emperor at home than a Prince upon his holidays!'

Silas was again lucky. He observed a person of rather a full build, strikingly handsome, and of a very stately and courteous demeanor, seated at table with another handsome young man, several years his junior, who addressed him with conspicuous deference. The name of Prince struck gratefully on Silas's republican hearing, and the aspect of the person to whom that name was applied exercised its usual charm upon his mind. He left Madame Zéphyrine and her Englishman to take care of each other, and threading his way through the assembly, approached the table which the Prince and his confidant had honoured with their choice.

'I tell you, Geraldine,' the former was saying, 'the action is madness. Yourself (I am glad to remember it) chose your brother for this perilous service, and you are bound in duty to have a guard upon his conduct. He has consented to delay so many days in Paris; that was already an imprudence, considering the character of the man he has to deal with; but now, when he is within eight and forty hours of his departure, when he is within two or three days of the decisive trial, I ask you, is this a place for him to spend his time? He should be in a gallery at practice; he should be sleeping long hours and taking moderate exercise on foot; he should be on a rigorous diet, without white wines or brandy. Does the dog imagine we are all playing comedy? The thing is deadly earnest, Geraldine.'

'I know the lad too well to interfere,' replied Colonel Geraldine, 'and well enough not to be alarmed. He is more cautious than you fancy, and of an indomitable spirit. If it had been a woman I should not say so much, but I trust the President to him and the two valets without an instant's apprehension.'

'I am gratified to hear you say so,' replied the Prince; 'but my mind is not at rest. These servants are well-trained spies, and already has not this miscreant succeeded three times in eluding their observation and spending several hours on end in private, and most likely dangerous, affairs? An amateur might have lost him by accident, but if Rudolph and Jerome were thrown off the scent, it must have been done on purpose, and by a man who had a cogent reason and exceptional resources.'

‘I believe the question is now one between my brother and myself,’ replied Geraldine, with a shade of offense in his tone.

‘I permit it to be so, Colonel Geraldine,’ returned Prince Florizel. ‘Perhaps, for that very reason, you should be all the more ready to accept my counsels. But enough. That girl in yellow dances well.’

And the talk veered into the ordinary topics of a Paris ballroom in the Carnival.

Silas remembered where he was, and that the hour was already near at hand when he ought to be upon the scene of his assignation. The more he reflected the less he liked the prospect, and as at that moment an eddy in the crowd began to draw him in the direction of the door, he suffered it to carry him away without resistance. The eddy stranded him in a corner under the gallery, where his car was immediately struck with the voice of Madame Zéphyrine. She was speaking in French with the young man of the blond locks who had been pointed out by the strange Britisher not half an hour before.

‘I have a character at stake,’ she said, ‘or I would put no other condition than my heart recommends. But you have only to say so much to the porter, and he will let you go by without a word.’

‘But why this talk of debt?’ objected her companion.

‘Heavens!’ said she, ‘do you think I do not understand my own hotel?’

And she went by, clinging affectionately to her companion’s arm.

This put Silas in mind of his billet.

‘Ten minutes hence,’ thought he, ‘and I may be walking with as beautiful a woman as that, and even better dressed – perhaps a real lady, possibly a woman of title.’

And then he remembered the spelling, and was a little downcast.

‘But it may have been written by her maid,’ he imagined.

The clock was only a few minutes from the hour, and this immediate proximity set his heart beating at a curious and rather disagreeable speed. He reflected with relief that he was in no way bound to put in an appearance. Virtue and cowardice were together, and he made once more for the door, but this time of his own accord, and battling against the stream of people which was now moving in a contrary direction. Perhaps this prolonged resistance wearied him, or perhaps he was in that frame of mind when merely to continue in the same determination for a certain number of

minutes produces a reaction and a different purpose. Certainly, at least, he wheeled about for a third time, and did not stop until he had found a place of concealment within a few yards of the appointed place.

Here he went through an agony of spirit, in which he several times prayed to God for help, for Silas had been devoutly educated. He had now not the least inclination for the meeting; nothing kept him from flight but a silly fear lest he should be thought unmanly; but this was so powerful that it kept head against all other motives; and although it could not decide him to advance, prevented him from definitely running away. At last the clock indicated ten minutes past the hour. Young Scuddamore's spirit began to rise; he peered round the corner and saw no one at the place of meeting; doubtless his unknown correspondent had wearied and gone away. He became as bold as he had formerly been timid. It seemed to him that if he came at all to the appointment, however late, he was clear from the charge of cowardice. Nay, now he began to suspect a hoax, and actually complimented himself on his shrewdness in having suspected and outmanœuvred his mystifiers. So very idle a thing is a boy's mind!

Armed with these reflections, he advanced boldly from his corner; but he had not taken above a couple of steps before a hand was laid upon his arm. He turned and beheld a lady cast in a very large mould and with somewhat stately features, but bearing no mark of severity in her looks.

'I see that you are a very self-confident lady-killer,' said she; 'for you make yourself expected. But I was determined to meet you. When a woman has once so far forgotten herself as to make the first advance, she has long ago left behind her all considerations of petty pride.'

Silas was overwhelmed by the size and attractions of his correspondent and the suddenness with which she had fallen upon him. But she soon set him at his ease. She was very towardly and lenient in her behaviour; she led him on to make pleasantries, and then applauded him to the echo; and in a very short time, between blandishments and a liberal exhibition of warm brandy, she had not only induced him to fancy himself in love, but to declare his passion with the greatest vehemence.

'Alas!' she said; 'I do not know whether I ought not to deplore this moment, great as is the pleasure you give me by your words. Hitherto I was alone to suffer; now, poor boy, there will be two. I am not my own mistress. I dare not ask you to visit me at my own house, for I am watched by jealous

eyes. Let me see,' she added; 'I am older than you, although so much weaker; and while I trust in your courage and determination, I must employ my own knowledge of the world for our mutual benefit. Where do you live?'

He told her that he lodged in a furnished hotel, and named the street and number.

She seemed to reflect for some minutes, with an effort of mind.

'I see,' she said at last. 'You will be faithful and obedient, will you not?'

Silas assured her eagerly of his fidelity.

'To-morrow night, then,' she continued, with an encouraging smile, 'you must remain at home all the evening; and if any friends should visit you, dismiss them at once on any pretext that most readily presents itself. Your door is probably shut by ten?' she asked.

'By eleven,' answered Silas.

'At a quarter past eleven,' pursued the lady, 'leave the house. Merely cry for the door to be opened, and be sure you fall into no talk with the porter, as that might ruin everything. Go straight to the corner where the Luxembourg Gardens join the Boulevard; there you will find me waiting you. I trust you to follow my advice from point to point: and remember, if you fail me in only one particular, you will bring the sharpest trouble on a woman whose only fault is to have seen and loved you.'

'I cannot see the use of all these instructions,' said Silas.

'I believe you are already beginning to treat me as a master,' she cried, tapping him with her fan upon the arm. 'Patience, patience! that should come in time. A woman loves to be obeyed at first, although afterwards she finds her pleasure in obeying. Do as I ask you, for Heaven's sake, or I will answer for nothing. Indeed, now I think of it,' she added, with the manner of one who had just seen further into a difficulty, 'I find a better plan of keeping importunate visitors away. Tell the porter to admit no one for you, except a person who may come that night to claim a debt; and speak with some feeling, as though you feared the interview, so that he may take your words in earnest.'

'I think you may trust me to protect myself against intruders,' he said, not without a little pique.

'That is how I should prefer the thing arranged,' she answered, coldly. 'I know you men; you think nothing of a woman's reputation.'

Silas blushed and somewhat hung his head; for the scheme he had in view had involved a little vain-glorying before his acquaintances.

‘Above all,’ she added, ‘do not speak to the porter as you come out.’

‘And why?’ said he. ‘Of all your instructions, that seems to me the least important.’

‘You at first doubted the wisdom of some of the others, which you now see to be very necessary,’ she replied. ‘Believe me, this also has its uses; in time you will see them; and what am I to think of your affection, if you refuse me such trifles at our first interview?’

Silas confounded himself in explanations and apologies; in the middle of these she looked up at the clock and clapped her hands together with a suppressed scream.

‘Heavens!’ she cried, ‘is it so late? I have not an instant to lose. Alas, we poor women, what slaves we are! What have I not risked for you already?’

And after repeating her directions, which she artfully combined with caresses and the most abandoned looks, she bade him farewell and disappeared among the crowd.

The whole of the next day Silas was filled with a sense of great importance; he was now sure she was a countess; and when evening came he minutely obeyed her orders and was at the corner of the Luxembourg Gardens by the hour appointed. No one was there. He waited nearly half an hour, looking in the face of everyone who passed or loitered near the spot; he even visited the neighboring corners of the Boulevard and made a complete circuit of the garden railings; but there was no beautiful countess to throw herself into his arms. At last, and most reluctantly, he began to retrace his steps towards his hotel. On the way he remembered the words he had heard pass between Madame Zéphyrine and the blond young man, and they gave him an indefinite uneasiness.

‘It appears,’ he reflected, ‘that everyone has to tell lies to our porter.’

He rang the bell, the door opened before him, and the porter in his bed-clothes came to offer him a light.

‘Has he gone?’ inquired the porter.

‘He? Whom do you mean?’ asked Silas, somewhat sharply, for he was irritated by his disappointment.

‘I did not notice him go out,’ continued the porter, ‘but I trust you paid him. We do not care, in this house, to have lodgers who cannot meet their

liabilities.'

'What the devil do you mean?' demanded Silas, rudely. 'I cannot understand a word of this farrago.'

'The short, blond young man who came for his debt,' returned the other. 'Him it is I mean. Who else should it be, when I had your orders to admit no one else?'

'Why, good God, of course he never came,' retorted Silas.

'I believe what I believe,' retorted the porter, putting his tongue into his cheek with a most roguish air.

'You are an insolent scoundrel,' cried Silas, and, feeling that he had made a ridiculous exhibition of asperity, and at the same time bewildered by a dozen alarms, he turned and began to run up stairs.

'Do you not want a light then?' cried the porter.

But Silas only hurried the faster, and did not pause until he had reached the seventh landing and stood in front of his own door. There he waited a moment to recover his breath, assailed by the worst forebodings and almost dreading to enter the room.

When at last he did so he was relieved to find it dark, and to all appearance, untenanted. He drew a long breath. Here he was, home again in safety, and this should be his last folly as certainly as it had been his first. The matches stood on a little table by the bed, and he began to grope his way in that direction. As he moved, his apprehensions grew upon him once more, and he was pleased, when his foot encountered an obstacle, to find it nothing more alarming than a chair. At last he touched curtains. From the position of the window, which was faintly visible, he knew he must be at the foot of the bed, and had only to feel his way along it in order to reach the table in question.

He lowered his hand, but what he touched was not simply a counterpane – it was a counterpane with something underneath it like the outline of a human leg. Silas withdrew his arm and stood a moment petrified.

'What, what,' he thought, 'can this betoken?'

He listened intently, but there was no sound of breathing. Once more, with a great effort, he reached out the end of his finger to the spot he had already touched; but this time he leaped back half a yard, and stood shivering and fixed with terror. There was something in his bed. What it was he knew not, but there was something there.

It was some seconds before he could move. Then, guided by an instinct, he fell straight upon the matches, and keeping his back toward the bed, lighted a candle. As soon as the flame had kindled, he turned slowly round and looked for what he feared to see. Sure enough, there was the worst of his imaginations realized. The coverlid was drawn carefully up over the pillow, but it moulded the outline of a human body lying motionless; and when he dashed forward and flung aside the sheets, he beheld the blond young man whom he had seen in the Bullier Ball the night before, his eyes open and without speculation, his face swollen and blackened, and a thin stream of blood trickling from his nostrils.

Silas uttered a long, tremulous wail, dropped the candle, and fell on his knees beside the bed.

Silas was awakened from the stupor into which his terrible discovery had plunged him, by a prolonged but discreet tapping at the door. It took him some seconds to remember his position; and when he hastened to prevent anyone from entering it was already too late. Dr Noel, in a tall nightcap, carrying a lamp which lighted up his long white countenance, sidling in his gait, and peering and cocking his head like some sort of bird, pushed the door slowly open, and advanced into the middle of the room.

'I thought I heard a cry,' began the Doctor, 'and fearing you might be unwell, I did not hesitate to offer this intrusion.'

Silas, with a flushed face and a fearful beating heart, kept between the Doctor and the bed; but he found no voice to answer.

'You are in the dark,' pursued the Doctor; 'and yet you have not even begun to prepare for rest. You will not easily persuade me against my own eyesight; and your face declares most eloquently that you require either a friend or a physician – which is it to be? Let me feel your pulse, for that is often a just reporter of the heart.'

He advanced to Silas, who still retreated before him backwards, and sought to take him by the wrist; but the strain on the young American's nerves had become too great for endurance. He avoided the Doctor with a febrile movement, and, throwing himself upon the floor, burst into a flood of weeping.

As soon as Dr Noel perceived the dead man in the bed his face darkened; and hurrying back to the door which he had left ajar, he hastily closed and double-locked it.

‘Up!’ he cried, addressing Silas in strident tones. ‘This is no time for weeping. What have you done? How came this body in your room. Speak freely to one who may be helpful. Do you imagine I would ruin you? Do you think this piece of dead flesh on your pillow can alter in any degree the sympathy with which you have inspired me? Credulous youth, the horror with which blind and unjust law regards an action never attaches to the doer in the eyes of those who love him; and if I saw the friend of my heart return to me out of seas of blood he would be in no way changed in my affection. Raise yourself,’ he said; ‘good and ill are a chimera; there is naught in life except destiny, and however you may be circumstanced there is one at your side who will help you to the last.’

Thus encouraged, Silas gathered himself together, and in a broken voice, and helped out by the Doctor’s interrogation, contrived at last to put him in possession of the facts. But the conversation between the Prince and Geraldine he altogether omitted, as he had understood little of its purport, and had no idea that it was in any way related to his own misadventure.

‘Alas!’ cried Dr Noel, ‘I am much abused, or you have fallen innocently into the most dangerous hands in Europe. Poor boy, what a pit has been dug for your simplicity! into what a deadly peril have your unwary feet been conducted! This man,’ he said, ‘this Englishman, whom you twice saw, and whom I suspect to be the soul of the contrivance, can you describe him? Was he young or old? tall or short?’

But Silas, who, for all his curiosity, had not a seeing eye in his head, was able to supply nothing but meagre generalities, which it was impossible to recognize.

‘I would have it a piece of education in all schools!’ cried the Doctor angrily. ‘Where is the use of eyesight and articulate speech if a man cannot observe and recollect the features of his enemy? I, who know all the gangs of Europe, might have identified him, and gained new weapons for your defence. Cultivate this art in future, my poor boy; you may find it of momentous service.’

‘The future!’ repeated Silas. ‘What future is there left for me except the gallows?’

‘Youth is but a cowardly season,’ returned the Doctor; ‘and a man’s own troubles look blacker than they are. I am old, and yet I never despair.’

‘Can I tell such a story to the police?’ demanded Silas.

‘Assuredly not,’ replied the Doctor. ‘From what I see already of the machination in which you have been involved, your case is desperate upon that side; and for the narrow eye of the authorities you are infallibly the guilty person. And remember that we only know a portion of the plot; and the same infamous contrivers have doubtless arranged many other circumstances which would be elicited by a police inquiry, and help to fix the guilt more certainly upon your innocence.’

‘I am then lost, indeed!’ cried Silas.

‘I have not said so,’ answered Dr Noel, ‘for I am a cautious man.’

‘But look at this!’ objected Silas, pointing to the body. ‘Here is this object in my bed: not to be explained, not to be disposed of, not to be regarded without horror.’

‘Horror?’ replied the Doctor. ‘No. When this sort of clock has run down, it is no more to me than an ingenious piece of mechanism, to be investigated with the bistery. When blood is once cold and stagnant, it is no longer human blood; when flesh is once dead, it is no longer that flesh which we desire in our lovers and respect in our friends. The grace, the attraction, the terror, have all gone from it with the animating spirit. Accustom yourself to look upon it with composure; for if my scheme is practicable you will have to live in constant proximity to that which now so greatly horrifies you.’

‘Your scheme?’ cried Silas. ‘What is that? Tell me speedily, Doctor; for I have scarcely courage enough to continue to exist.’

Without replying, Dr Noel turned towards the bed, and proceeded to examine the corpse.

‘Quite dead,’ he murmured. ‘Yes, as I had supposed, the pockets empty. Yes, and the name cut off the shirt. Their work has been done thoroughly and well. Fortunately he is of small stature.’

Silas followed these words with an extreme anxiety. At last the Doctor, his autopsy completed, took a chair and addressed the young American with a smile.

‘Since I came into your room,’ said he, ‘although my ears and my tongue have been so busy, I have not suffered my eyes to remain idle. I noted a little while ago that you have there, in the corner, one of those monstrous constructions which your fellow-countrymen carry with them into all quarters of the globe – in a word, a Saratoga trunk. Until this moment I

have never been able to conceive the utility of these erections; but then I began to have a glimmer. Whether it was for convenience in the slave trade, or to obviate the results of too ready an employment of the bowie-knife, I cannot bring myself to decide. But one thing I see plainly – the object of such a box is to contain a human body.'

'Surely,' cried Silas, 'surely this is not a time for jesting.'

'Although I may express myself with some degree of pleasantry,' replied the Doctor, 'the purport of my words is entirely serious. And the first thing we have to do, my young friend, is to empty your coffer of all it contains.'

Silas, obeying the authority of Doctor Noel, put himself at his disposition. The Saratoga trunk was soon gutted of its contents, which made a considerable litter on the floor; and then – Silas taking the heels and the Doctor supporting the shoulders – the body of the murdered man was carried from the bed, and, after some difficulty, doubled up and inserted whole into the empty box. With an effort on the part of both, the lid was forced down upon this unusual baggage, and the trunk was locked and corded by the Doctor's own hand, while Silas disposed of what had been taken out between the closet and a chest of drawers.

'Now,' said the Doctor, 'the first step has been taken on the way to your deliverance. To-morrow, or rather today, it must be your task to allay the suspicions of your porter, paying him all that you owe; while you may trust me to make the arrangements necessary to a safe conclusion. Meantime, follow me to my room, where I shall give you a safe and powerful opiate; for, whatever you do you must have rest.'

The next day was the longest in Silas's memory; it seemed as if it would never be done. He denied himself to his friends, and sat in a corner with his eyes fixed upon the Saratoga trunk in dismal contemplation. His own former indiscretions were now returned upon him in kind; for the observatory had been once more opened, and he was conscious of an almost continual study from Madame Zéphyrine's apartment. So distressing did this become, that he was at last obliged to block up the spy-hole from his own side; and when he was thus secured from observation he spent a considerable portion of his time in contrite tears and prayer.

Late in the evening Dr Noel entered the room carrying in his hand a pair of sealed envelopes without address, one somewhat bulky, and the other so slim as to seem without enclosure.

‘Silas,’ he said, seating himself at the table, ‘the time has now come for me to explain my plan for your salvation. To-morrow morning, at an early hour, Prince Florizel of Bohemia returns to London, after having diverted himself for a few days with the Parisian Carnival. It was my fortune, a good while ago, to do Colonel Geraldine, his Master of the Horse, one of those services so common in my profession, which are never forgotten upon either side. I have no need to explain to you the nature of the obligation under which he was laid; suffice it to say that I knew him ready to serve me in any practicable manner. Now, it was necessary for you to gain London with your trunk unopened. To this the Custom House seemed to oppose a fatal difficulty; but I bethought me that the baggage of so considerable a person as the Prince is, as a matter of courtesy, passed without examination by the officers of Custom. I applied to Colonel Geraldine, and succeeded in obtaining a favourable answer. To-morrow, if you go before six to the hotel where the Prince lodges, your baggage will be passed over as a part of his, and you yourself will make the journey as a member of his suite.’

‘It seems to me, as you speak, that I have already seen both the Prince and Colonel Geraldine; I even overheard some of their conversation the other evening at the Bullier Ball.’

‘It is probable enough; for the Prince loves to mix with all societies,’ replied the Doctor. ‘Once arrived in London,’ he pursued, ‘your task is nearly ended. In this more bulky envelope I have given you a letter which I dare not address; but in the other you will find the designation of the house to which you must carry it along with your box, which will there be taken from you and not trouble you any more.’

‘Alas!’ said Silas, ‘I have every wish to believe you; but how is it possible? You open up to me a bright prospect, but, I ask you, is my mind capable of receiving so unlikely a solution? Be more generous, and let me farther understand your meaning.’

The Doctor seemed painfully impressed.

‘Boy,’ he answered, ‘you do not know how hard a thing you ask of me. But be it so. I am now inured to humiliation; and it would be strange if I refused you this, after having granted you so much. Know, then, that although I now make so quiet an appearance – frugal, solitary, addicted to study – when I was younger, my name was once a rallying-cry among the most astute and dangerous spirits of London; and while I was outwardly an

object for respect and consideration, my true power resided in the most secret, terrible, and criminal relations. It is to one of the persons who then obeyed me that I now address myself to deliver you from your burden. They were men of many different nations and dexterities, all bound together by a formidable oath, and working to the same purposes; the trade of the association was in murder; and I who speak to you, innocent as I appear, was the chieftain of this redoubtable crew.'

'What?' cried Silas. 'A murderer? And one with whom murder was a trade? Can I take your hand? Ought I to so much as accept your services? Dark and criminal old man, would you make an accomplice of my youth and my distress?'

The Doctor bitterly laughed.

'You are difficult to please, Mr Scuddamore,' said he; 'but I now offer you your choice of company between the murdered man and the murderer. If your conscience is too nice to accept my aid, say so, and I will immediately leave you. Thenceforward you can deal with your trunk and its belongings as best suits your upright conscience.'

'I own myself wrong,' replied Silas. 'I should have remembered how generously you offered to shield me, even before I had convinced you of my innocence, and I continue to listen to your counsels with gratitude.'

'That is well,' returned the Doctor; 'and I perceive you are beginning to learn some of the lessons of experience.'

'At the same time,' resumed the New Englander, 'as you confess yourself accustomed to this tragical business, and the people to whom you recommend me are your own former associates and friends, could you not yourself undertake the transport of the box, and rid me at once of its detested presence?'

'Upon my word,' replied the Doctor, 'I admire you cordially. If you do not think I have already meddled sufficiently in your concerns, believe me, from my heart I think the contrary. Take or leave my services as I offer them; and trouble me with no more words of gratitude, for I value your consideration even more lightly than I do your intellect. A time will come, if you should be spared to see a number of years in health and mind, when you will think differently of all this, and blush for your to-night's behaviour.'

So saying, the Doctor arose from his chair, repeated his directions briefly and clearly, and departed from the room without permitting Silas any time to answer.

The next morning Silas presented himself at the hotel, where he was politely received by Colonel Geraldine, and relieved, from that moment, of all immediate alarm about his trunk and its grisly contents. The journey passed over without much incident, although the young man was horrified to overhear the sailors and railway porters complaining among themselves about the unusual weight of the Prince's baggage. Silas traveled in a carriage with the valets, for Prince Florizel chose to be alone with his Master of the Horse. On board the steamer, however, Silas attracted his Highness's attention by the melancholy of his air and attitude as he stood gazing at the pile of baggage; for he was still full of disquietude about the future.

'There is a young man,' observed the Prince, 'who must have some cause for sorrow.'

'That,' replied Geraldine, 'is the American for whom I obtained permission to travel with your suite.'

'You remind me that I have been remiss in courtesy,' said Prince Florizel, and advancing to Silas, he addressed him with the most exquisite condescension in these words:

'I was charmed, young sir, to be able to gratify the desire you made known to me through Colonel Geraldine. Remember, if you please, that I shall be glad at any future time to lay you under a more serious obligation.'

And then he put some questions as to the political condition of America, which Silas answered with sense and propriety.

'You are still a young man,' said the Prince; 'but I observe you to be very serious for your years. Perhaps you allow your attention to be too much occupied with grave studies. But, perhaps, on the other hand, I am myself indiscreet and touch upon a painful subject.'

'I have certainly cause to be the most miserable of men,' said Silas; 'never has a more innocent person been more dismally abused.'

'I will not ask you for your confidence,' returned Prince Florizel. 'But do not forget that Colonel Geraldine's recommendation is an unfailing passport; and that I am not only willing, but possibly more able than many others, to do you a service.'

Silas was delighted with the amiability of this great personage; but his mind soon returned upon its gloomy pre-occupations; for not even the favour of a Prince to a republican can discharge a brooding spirit of its cares.

The train arrived at Charing Cross, where the officers of the Revenue respected the baggage of Prince Florizel in the usual manner. The most elegant equipages were in waiting; and Silas was driven, along with the rest, to the Prince's residence. There Colonel Geraldine sought him out, and expressed himself pleased to have been of any service to a friend of the physician's, for whom he professed a great consideration.

'I hope,' he added, 'that you will find none of your porcelain injured. Special orders were given along the line to deal tenderly with the Prince's effects.'

And then, directing the servants to place one of the carriages at the young gentleman's disposal, and at once to charge the Saratoga trunk upon the dickey, the Colonel shook hands and excused himself on account of his occupations in the princely household.

Silas now broke the seal of the envelope containing the address, and directed the stately footman to drive him to Box Court, opening off the Strand. It seemed as if the place were not at all unknown to the man, for he looked startled and begged a repetition of the order. It was with a heart full of alarms, that Silas mounted into the luxurious vehicle, and was driven to his destination. The entrance to Box Court was too narrow for the passage of a coach; it was a mere footway between railings, with a post at either end. On one of these posts was seated a man, who at once jumped down and exchanged a friendly sign with the driver, while the footman opened the door and inquired of Silas whether he should take down the Saratoga trunk, and to what number it should be carried.

'If you please,' said Silas. 'To number three.'

The footman and the man who had been sitting on the post, even with the aid of Silas himself, had hard work to carry in the trunk; and before it was deposited at the door of the house in question, the young American was horrified to find a score of loiterers looking on. But he knocked with as good a countenance as he could muster up, and presented the other envelope to him who opened.

‘He is not at home,’ said he, ‘but if you will leave your letter and return to-morrow early, I shall be able to inform you whether and when he can receive your visit. Would you like to leave your box?’ he added.

‘Dearly,’ cried Silas; and the next moment he repented his precipitation, and declared, with equal emphasis, that he would rather carry the box along with him to the hotel.

The crowd jeered at his indecision and followed him to the carriage with insulting remarks; and Silas, covered with shame and terror, implored the servants to conduct him to some quiet and comfortable house of entertainment in the immediate neighbourhood.

The Prince’s equipage deposited Silas at the Craven Hotel in Craven Street, and immediately drove away, leaving him alone with the servants of the inn. The only vacant room, it appeared, was a little den up four pairs of stairs, and looking towards the back. To this hermitage, with infinite trouble and complaint, a pair of stout porters carried the Saratoga trunk. It is needless to mention that Silas kept closely at their heels throughout the ascent, and had his heart in his mouth at every corner. A single false step, he reflected, and the box might go over the banisters and land its fatal contents, plainly discovered, on the pavement of the hall.

Arrived in the room, he sat down on the edge of his bed to recover from the agony that he had just endured; but he had hardly taken his position when he was recalled to a sense of his peril by the action of the boots, who had knelt beside the trunk, and was proceeding officiously to undo its elaborate fastenings.

‘Let it be!’ cried Silas. ‘I shall want nothing from it while I stay here.’

‘You might have let it lie in the hall then,’ growled the man; ‘a thing as big and heavy as a church. What you have inside, I cannot fancy. If it is all money, you are a richer man than me.’

‘Money?’ repeated Silas, in a sudden perturbation. ‘What did you mean by money? I have no money, and you are speaking like a fool.’

‘All right, Captain,’ retorted the boots with a wink. ‘There’s nobody will touch your lordship’s money. I’m as safe as the bank,’ he added; ‘but as the box is heavy, I shouldn’t mind drinking something to your lordship’s health.’

Silas pressed two Napoleons upon his acceptance, apologizing, at the same time, for being obliged to trouble him with foreign money, and

pleading his recent arrival for excuse. And the man, grumbling with even greater fervor, and looking contemptuously from the money in his hand to the Saratoga trunk and back again from the one to the other, at last consented to withdraw.

For nearly two days the dead body had been packed into Silas's box; and as soon as he was alone the unfortunate New Englander nosed all the cracks and openings with the most passionate attention. But the weather was cool, and the trunk still managed to contain his shocking secret.

He took a chair beside it, and buried his face in his hands, and his mind in the most profound reflection. If he were not speedily relieved, no question but he must be speedily discovered. Alone in a strange city, without friends or accomplices, if the Doctor's introduction failed him, he was indubitably a lost New Englander. He reflected pathetically over his ambitious designs for the future; he should not now become the hero and spokesman of his native place of Bangor, Maine; he should not, as he had fondly anticipated, move on from office to office, from honour to honour; he might as well divest himself at once of all hope of being acclaimed President of the United States, and leaving behind him a statue, in the worst possible style of art, to adorn the Capitol at Washington. Here he was, chained to a dead Englishman doubled up inside a Saratoga trunk; whom he must get rid of, or perish from the rolls of national glory!

I should be afraid to chronicle the language employed by this young man to the Doctor, to the murdered man, to Madame Zéphyrine, to the boots of the hotel, to the Prince's servants, and, in a word, to all who had been ever so remotely connected with his horrible misfortune.

He slunk down to dinner about seven at night; but the yellow coffee-room appalled him, the eyes of the other diners seemed to rest on his with suspicion, and his mind remained upstairs with the Saratoga trunk. When the waiter came to offer him cheese, his nerves were already so much on edge that he leaped half-way out of his chair and upset the remainder of a pint of ale upon the table-cloth.

The fellow offered to show him the smoking-room when he had done; and although he would have much preferred to return at once to his perilous treasure, he had not the courage to refuse, and was shown downstairs, to the black, gas-lit cellar, which formed, and possibly still forms, the divan of the Craven Hotel.

Two very sad betting men were playing billiards, attended by a moist, consumptive marker; and for the moment Silas imagined that these were the only occupants of the apartment. But at the next glance his eye fell upon a person smoking in the farthest corner, with lowered eyes and a most respectable and modest aspect. He knew at once that he had seen the face before; and in spite of the entire change of clothes, recognized the man whom he had found seated on a post at the entrance to Box Court, and who had helped him to carry the trunk to and from the carriage. The New Englander simply turned and ran, nor did he pause until he had locked and bolted himself into his bedroom.

There, all night long, a prey to the most terrible imaginations, he watched beside the fatal boxful of dead flesh. The suggestion of the boots that his trunk was full of gold inspired him with all manner of new terrors, if he so much as dared to close an eye; and the presence in the smoking-room, and under an obvious disguise, of the loiterer from Box Court convinced him that he was once more the centre of obscure machination.

Midnight had sounded some time, when, impelled by uneasy suspicions, Silas opened his bedroom door and peered into the passage. It was dimly illuminated by a single jet of gas; and some distance off he perceived a man sleeping on the floor in the costume of an hotel under-servant. Silas drew near the man on tip-toe. He lay partly on his back, partly on his side, and his right forearm concealed his face from recognition. Suddenly, while the American was still bending over him, the sleeper removed his arm and opened his eyes, and Silas found himself once more face to face with the loiterer of Box Court.

‘Good night, sir,’ said the man, pleasantly.

But Silas was too profoundly moved to find an answer, and regained his room in silence.

Towards morning, worn out by apprehension, he fell asleep on his chair, with his head forward on the trunk. In spite of so constrained an attitude and such a grisly pillow, his slumber was sound and prolonged, and he was only awakened at a late hour and by a sharp tapping at the door.

He hurried to open, and found the boots without.

‘You are the gentleman who called yesterday at Box Court?’ he asked.

Silas, with a quaver, admitted that he had done so.

‘Then this note is for you,’ added the servant, proffering a sealed envelope.

Silas tore it open, and found inside the words: ‘Twelve o’clock.’

He was punctual to the hour; the trunk was carried before him by several stout servants; and he was himself ushered into a room, where a man sat warming himself before the fire with his back towards the door. The sound of so many persons entering and leaving, and the scraping of the trunk as it was deposited upon the bare boards, were alike unable to attract the notice of the occupant; and Silas stood waiting, in an agony of fear, until he should deign to recognize his presence.

Perhaps five minutes had elapsed before the man turned leisurely about, and disclosed the features of Prince Florizel of Bohemia.

‘So, sir,’ he said with great severity, ‘this is the manner in which you abuse my politeness. You join yourself to persons of condition, I perceive, for no other purpose than to escape the consequences of your crimes; and I can readily understand your embarrassment when I addressed myself to you yesterday.’

‘Indeed,’ cried Silas, ‘I am innocent of everything except misfortune.’

And in a hurried voice, and with the greatest ingenuousness, he recounted to the Prince the whole history of his calamity.

‘I see I have been mistaken,’ said his Highness, when he had heard him to an end. ‘You are no other than a victim, and since I am not to punish you, you may be sure I shall do my utmost to help. And now,’ he continued, ‘to business. Open your box at once, and let me see what it contains.’

Silas changed color.

‘I almost fear to look upon it,’ he exclaimed.

‘Nay,’ replied the Prince, ‘have you not looked at it already? This is a form of sentimentality to be resisted. The sight of a sick man, whom we can still help, should appeal more directly to the feelings than that of a dead man who is equally beyond help or harm, love or hatred. Nerve yourself, Mr Scuddamore,’ and then, seeing that Silas still hesitated, ‘I do not desire to give another name to my request,’ he added.

The young American awoke as if out of a dream, and with a shiver of repugnance addressed himself to loose the straps and open the lock of the Saratoga trunk. The Prince stood by, watching with a composed countenance and his hands behind his back. The body was quite stiff, and it

cost Silas a great effort, both moral and physical, to dislodge it from its position, and discover the face.

Prince Florizel started back with an exclamation of painful surprise.

‘Alas!’ he cried, ‘you little know, Mr Scuddamore, what a cruel gift you have brought me. This is a young man of my own suite, the brother of my trusted friend; and it was upon matters of my own service that he has thus perished at the hands of violent and treacherous men. Poor Geraldine,’ he went on, as if to himself, ‘in what words am I to tell you of your brother’s fate? How can I excuse myself in your eyes, or in the eyes of God, for the presumptuous schemes that led him to this bloody and unnatural death? Ah, Florizel! Florizel! when will you learn the discretion that suits mortal life, and be no longer dazzled with the image of power at your disposal? Power!’ he cried; ‘who is more powerless? I look upon this young man whom I have sacrificed, Mr Scuddamore, and feel how small a thing it is to be a Prince.’

Silas was moved at the sight of his emotion. He tried to murmur some consolatory words, and burst into tears. The Prince, touched by his obvious intention, came up to him and took him by the hand.

‘Command yourself,’ said he. ‘We have both much to learn and we shall both be better men for to-day’s meeting.’

Silas thanked him in silence with an affectionate look.

‘Write me the address of Doctor Noel on this piece of paper,’ continued the Prince, leading him towards the table; ‘and let me recommend you, when you are again in Paris, to avoid the society of that dangerous man. He has acted in this matter on a generous inspiration; that I must believe; had he been privy to young Geraldine’s death he would never have despatched the body to the care of the actual criminal.’

‘The actual criminal!’ repeated Silas in astonishment.

‘Even so,’ returned the Prince. ‘This letter, which the disposition of Almighty Providence has so strangely delivered into my hands, was addressed to no less a person than the criminal himself, the infamous President of the Suicide Club. Seek to pry no further in these perilous affairs, but content yourself with your own miraculous escape, and leave this house at once. I have pressing affairs, and must arrange at once about this poor clay, which was so lately a gallant and handsome youth.’

Silas took a grateful and submissive leave of Prince Florizel, but he lingered in Box Court until he saw him depart in a splendid carriage on a

visit to Colonel Henderson of the police. Republican as he was, the young American took off his hat with almost a sentiment of devotion to the retreating carriage. And the same night he started by rail on his return to Paris.

Here (observes my Arabian Author) *is the end of the* STORY OF THE PHYSICIAN AND THE SARATOGA TRUNK. *Omitting some reflections on the power of Providence, highly pertinent in the original, but little suited to our occidental taste, I shall only add that Mr Scuddamore has already begun to mount the ladder of political fame, and by last advices was the Sheriff of his native town*.

The Adventure of the Hansom Cab

Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich had greatly distinguished himself in one of the lesser Indian hill wars. He it was who took the chieftain prisoner with his own hand; his gallantry was universally applauded; and when he came home, prostrated by an ugly sabre cut and a protracted jungle fever, society was prepared to welcome the Lieutenant as a celebrity of minor luster. But his was a character remarkable for unaffected modesty; adventure was dear to his heart, but he cared little for adulation; and he waited at foreign watering-places and in Algiers until the fame of his exploits had run through its nine days' vitality and begun to be forgotten. He arrived in London at last, in the early season, with as little observation as he could desire; and as he was an orphan and had none but distant relatives who lived in the provinces, it was almost as a foreigner that he installed himself in the capital of the country for which he had shed his blood.

On the day following his arrival he dined alone at a military club. He shook hands with a few old comrades, and received their congratulations; but as one and all had some engagement for the evening, he found himself left entirely to his own resources. He was in dress, for he had entertained the notion of visiting a theater. But the great city was new to him; he had gone from a provincial school to a military college, and thence direct to the Eastern Empire; and he promised himself a variety of delights in this world for exploration. Swinging his cane, he took his way westward. It was a mild evening, already dark, and now and then threatening rain. The succession of faces in the lamplight stirred the Lieutenant's imagination; and it seemed to him as if he could walk for ever in that stimulating city atmosphere and surrounded by the mystery of four million private lives. He glanced at the houses, and marvelled what was passing behind those warmly-lighted windows; he looked into face after face, and saw them each intent upon some unknown interest, criminal or kindly.

‘They talk of war,’ he thought, ‘but this is the great battlefield of mankind.’

And then he began to wonder that he should walk so long in this complicated scene, and not chance upon so much as the shadow of an adventure for himself.

‘All in good time,’ he reflected. ‘I am still a stranger, and perhaps wear a strange air. But I must be drawn into the eddy before long.’

The night was already well advanced, when a plump of cold rain fell suddenly out of the darkness. Brackenbury paused under some trees, and as he did so he caught sight of a hansom cabman making him a sign that he was disengaged. The circumstance fell in so happily to the occasion that he at once raised his cane in answer, and had soon ensconced himself in the London gondola.

‘Where to, sir?’ asked the driver.

‘Where you please,’ said Brackenbury.

And immediately, at a pace of surprising swiftness, the hansom drove off through the rain into a maze of villas. One villa was so like another, each with its front garden, and there was so little to distinguish the deserted lamplit streets and crescents through which the flying hansom took its way, that Brackenbury soon lost all idea of direction. He would have been contented to believe that the cabman was amusing himself by driving him round and round and in and out about a small quarter, but there was something businesslike in the speed which convinced him of the contrary. The man had an object in view, he was hastening towards a definite end and Brackenbury was at once astonished at the fellow’s skill in picking a way through such a labyrinth, and a little concerned to imagine what was the occasion of his hurry. He had heard tales of strangers falling ill in London. Did the driver belong to some bloody and treacherous association? and was he himself being whirled to a murderous death?

The thought had scarcely presented itself, when the cab swung sharply round a corner and pulled up before the garden gate of a villa in a long and wide road. The house was brilliantly lighted up. Another hansom had just driven away, and Brackenbury could see a gentleman being admitted at the front door and received by several liveried servants. He was surprised that the cabman should have stopped so immediately in front of a house where a reception was being held; but he did not doubt it was the result of accident,

and sat placidly smoking where he was, until he heard the trap thrown open over his head.

‘Here we are, sir,’ said the driver.

‘Here!’ repeated Brackenbury. ‘Where?’

‘You told me to take you where I pleased, sir,’ returned the man with a chuckle, ‘and here we are.’

It struck Brackenbury that the voice was wonderfully smooth and courteous for a man in so inferior a position; he remembered the speed at which he had been driven; and now it occurred to him that the hansom was more luxuriously appointed than the common run of public conveyances.

‘I must ask you to explain,’ said he. ‘Do you mean to turn me out into the rain? My good man, I suspect the choice is mine.’

‘The choice is certainly yours,’ replied the driver, ‘but when I tell you all, I believe I know how a gentleman of your figure will decide. There is a gentlemen’s party in this house. I do not know whether the master be a stranger to London and without acquaintances of his own; or whether he is a man of odd notions. But certainly I was hired to kidnap single gentlemen in evening dress, as many as I pleased, but military officers by preference. You have simply to go in and say that Mr Morris invited you.’

‘Are you Mr Morris?’ inquired the Lieutenant.

‘Oh, no,’ replied the cabman. ‘Mr Morris is the person of the house.’

‘It is not a common way of collecting guests,’ said Brackenbury; ‘but an eccentric man might very well indulge the whim without any intention to offend. And suppose that I refuse Mr Morris’s invitation,’ he went on, ‘what then?’

‘My orders are to drive you back where I took you from,’ replied the man, ‘and set out to look for others up to midnight. Those who have no fancy for such an adventure, Mr Morris said, were not the guests for him.’

These words decided the Lieutenant on the spot.

‘After all,’ he reflected, as he descended from the hansom, ‘I have not had long to wait for my adventure.’

He had hardly found footing on the side-walk, and was still feeling in his pocket for the fare, when the cab swung about and drove off by the way it came at the former break-neck velocity. Brackenbury shouted after the man, who paid no heed, and continued to drive away; but the sound of his voice was overheard in the house, the door was again thrown open, emitting a

flood of light upon the garden, and a servant ran down to meet him holding an umbrella.

‘The cabman has been paid,’ observed the servant in a very civil tone; and he proceeded to escort Brackenbury along the path and up the steps. In the hall several other attendants relieved him of his hat, cane, and paletot, gave him a ticket with a number in return, and politely hurried him up a stair adorned with tropical flowers, to the door of an apartment on the first story. Here a grave butler inquired his name, and announcing ‘Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich,’ ushered him into the drawing-room of the house.

A young man, slender and singularly handsome, came forward and greeted him with an air at once courtly and affectionate. Hundreds of candles, of the finest wax, lit up a room perfumed, like the staircase, with a profusion of rare and beautiful flowering shrubs. A side-table was loaded with tempting viands. Several servants went to and fro with fruits and goblets of champagne. The company was perhaps sixteen in number, all men, few beyond the prime of life, and with hardly an exception, of a dashing and capable exterior.

They were divided into two groups, one about a roulette board, and the other surrounding a table at which one of their number held a bank of baccarat.

‘I see,’ thought Brackenbury, ‘I am in a private gambling saloon, and the cabman was a tout.’

His eye had embraced the details, and his mind formed the conclusion, while his host was still holding him by the hand; and to him his looks returned from this rapid survey. At a second view Mr Morris surprised him still more than on the first. The easy elegance of his manners, the distinction, amiability, and courage that appeared upon his features, fitted very ill with the Lieutenant’s preconceptions on the subject of the proprietor of a hell; and the tone of his conversation seemed to mark him out for a man of position and merit. Brackenbury found he had an instinctive liking for his entertainer and though he chid himself for the weakness he was unable to resist a sort of friendly attraction for Mr Morris’s person and character.

‘I have heard of you, Lieutenant Rich,’ said Mr Morris, lowering his tone; ‘and believe me I am gratified to make your acquaintance. Your looks accord with the reputation that has preceded you from India. And if you will

forget for a while the irregularity of your presentation in my house, I shall feel it not only an honour, but genuine pleasure besides. A man who makes a mouthful of barbarian cavaliers,' he added with a laugh, 'should not be appalled by a breach of etiquette, however serious.'

And he led him towards the sideboard and pressed him to partake of some refreshments.

'Upon my word,' the Lieutenant reflected, 'this is one of the pleasantest fellows and, I do not doubt, one of the most agreeable societies in London.'

He partook of some champagne, which he found excellent; and observing that many of the company were already smoking, he lit one of his own Manilas, and strolled up to the roulette board, where he sometimes made a stake and sometimes looked on smilingly on the fortune of others. It was while he was thus idling that he became aware of a sharp scrutiny to which the whole of the guests were subjected. Mr Morris went here and there, ostensibly busied on hospitable concerns; but he had ever a shrewd glance at disposal; not a man of the party escaped his sudden, searching looks; he took stock of the bearing of heavy losers, he valued the amount of the stakes, he paused behind couples who were deep in conversation; and, in a word, there was hardly a characteristic of anyone present but he seemed to catch and make a note of it. Brackenbury began to wonder if this were indeed a gambling hell: it had so much the air of a private inquisition. He followed Mr Morris in all his movements; and although the man had a ready smile, he seemed to perceive, as it were under a mask, a haggard, careworn, and preoccupied spirit. The fellows around him laughed and made their game; but Brackenbury had lost interest in the guests.

'This Morris,' thought he, 'is no idler in the room. Some deep purpose inspires him; let it be mine to fathom it.'

Now and then Mr Morris would call one of his visitors aside; and after a brief colloquy in an ante-room, he would return alone, and the visitors in question reappeared no more. After a certain number of repetitions, this performance excited Brackenbury's curiosity to a high degree. He determined to be at the bottom of this minor mystery at once; and strolling into the ante-room, found a deep window recess concealed by curtains of the fashionable green. Here he hurriedly ensconced himself; nor had he to wait long before the sound of steps and voices drew near him from the principal apartment. Peering through the division, he saw Mr Morris

escorting a fat and ruddy personage, with somewhat the look of a commercial traveler, whom Brackenbury had already remarked for his coarse laugh and under-bred behaviour at the table. The pair halted immediately before the window, so that Brackenbury lost not a word of the following discourse:—

'I beg you a thousand pardons!' began Mr Morris, with the most conciliatory manner; 'and, if I appear rude, I am sure you will readily forgive me. In a place so great as London accidents must continually happen; and the best that we can hope is to remedy them with as small delay as possible. I will not deny that I fear you have made a mistake and honoured my poor house by inadvertence; for, to speak openly, I cannot at all remember your appearance. Let me put the question without unnecessary circumlocution – between gentlemen of honour a word will suffice— Under whose roof do you suppose yourself to be?'

'That of Mr Morris,' replied the other, with a prodigious display of confusion, which had been visibly growing upon him throughout the last few words.

'Mr John or Mr James Morris?' inquired the host.

'I really cannot tell you,' returned the unfortunate guest. 'I am not personally acquainted with the gentleman, any more than I am with yourself.'

'I see,' said Mr Morris. 'There is another person of the same name farther down the street; and I have no doubt the policeman will be able to supply you with his number. Believe me, I felicitate myself on the misunderstanding which has procured me the pleasure of your company for so long; and let me express a hope that we may meet again upon a more regular footing. Meantime, I would not for the world detain you longer from your friends. John,' he added, raising his voice, 'will you see that the gentleman finds his great-coat?'

And with the most agreeable air Mr Morris escorted his visitor as far as the ante-room door, where he left him under conduct of the butler. As he passed the window, on his return to the drawing-room, Brackenbury could hear him utter a profound sigh, as though his mind was loaded with great anxiety, and his nerves already fatigued with the task on which he was engaged.

For perhaps an hour the hansoms kept arriving with such frequency, that Mr Morris had to receive a new guest for every old one that he sent away, and the company preserved its number undiminished. But towards the end of that time the arrivals grew few and far between, and at length ceased entirely, while the process of elimination was continued with unimpaired activity. The drawing-room began to look empty: the baccarat was discontinued for lack of a banker; more than one person said good-night of his own accord, and was suffered to depart without expostulation: and in the meanwhile Mr Morris redoubled in agreeable attentions to those who stayed behind. He went from group to group and from person to person with looks of the readiest sympathy and the most pertinent and pleasing talk; he was not so much like a host as like a hostess, and there was a feminine coquetry and condescension in his manner which charmed the hearts of all.

As the guests grew thinner, Lieutenant Rich strolled for a moment out of the drawing-room into the hall in quest of fresher air. But he had no sooner passed the threshold of the ante-chamber than he was brought to a dead halt by a discovery of the most surprising nature. The flowering shrubs had disappeared from the staircase; three large furniture wagons stood before the garden gate; the servants were busy dismantling the house upon all sides; and some of them had already donned their great-coats and were preparing to depart. It was like the end of a country ball, where everything has been supplied by contract. Brackenbury had indeed some matter for reflection. First, the guests, who were no real guests after all, had been dismissed; and now the servants, who could hardly be genuine servants, were actively dispersing.

‘Was the whole establishment a sham?’ he asked himself. ‘The mushroom of a single night which should disappear before morning?’

Watching a favourable opportunity, Brackenbury dashed upstairs to the higher regions of the house. It was as he had expected. He ran from room to room, and saw not a stick of furniture nor so much as a picture on the walls. Although the house had been painted and papered, it was not only uninhabited at present, but plainly had never been inhabited at all. The young officer remembered with astonishment its specious, settled, and hospitable air on his arrival. It was only at a prodigious cost that the imposture could have been carried out upon so great a scale.

Who, then, was Mr Morris? What was his intention in thus playing the householder for a single night in the remote west of London? And why did he collect his visitors at hazard from the streets?

Brackenbury remembered that he had already delayed too long, and hastened to join the company. Many had left during his absence; and counting the Lieutenant and his host, there were not more than five persons in the drawing-room – recently so thronged. Mr Morris greeted him, as he re-entered the apartment, with a smile, and immediately rose to his feet.

'It is now time, gentlemen,' said he, 'to explain my purpose in decoying you from your amusements. I trust you did not find the evening hang very dully on your hands; but my object, I will confess it, was not to entertain your leisure, but to help myself in an unfortunate necessity. You are all gentlemen,' he continued, 'your appearance does you that much justice, and I ask for no better security. Hence, I speak it without concealment, I ask you to render me a dangerous and delicate service; dangerous because you may run the hazard of your lives, and delicate because I must ask an absolute discretion upon all that you shall see or hear. From an utter stranger the request is almost comically extravagant; I am well aware of this; and I would add at once, if there be anyone present who has heard enough, if there be one among the party who recoils from a dangerous confidence and a piece of Quixotic devotion to he knows not whom – here is my hand ready, and I shall wish him good-night and Godspeed, with all the sincerity in the world.'

A very tall, black man, with a heavy stoop, immediately responded to this appeal.

'I commend your frankness, sir,' said he; 'and, for my part, I go. I make no reflections; but I cannot deny that you fill me with suspicious thoughts. I go myself, as I say; and perhaps you will think I have no right to add words to my example.'

'On the contrary,' replied Mr Morris, 'I am obliged to you for all you say. It would be impossible to exaggerate the gravity of my proposal.'

'Well, gentlemen, what do you say?' said the tall man, addressing the others. 'We have had our evening's frolic; shall we go homeward peaceably in a body? You will think well of my suggestion in the morning, when you see the sun again in innocence and safety.'

The speaker pronounced the last words with an intonation which added to their force; and his face wore a singular expression, full of gravity and significance. Another of the company rose hastily, and, with some appearance of alarm, prepared to take his leave. There were only two who held their ground, Brackenbury and an old red-nosed cavalry Major; but these two preserved a nonchalant demeanor, and, beyond a look of intelligence which they rapidly exchanged, appeared entirely foreign to the discussion that had just been terminated.

Mr Morris conducted the deserters as far as the door, which he closed upon their heels; then he turned round disclosing a countenance of mingled relief and animation, and addressed the two officers as follows:

'I have chosen my men like Joshua in the Bible,' said Mr Morris, 'and I now believe I have the pick of London. Your appearance pleased my hansom cabmen; then it delighted me; I watched your behaviour in a strange company, and under the most unusual circumstances: I have studied how you played and how you bore your losses; lastly, I have put you to the test of a staggering announcement, and you received it like an invitation to dinner. It is not for nothing,' he cried, 'that I have been for years the companion and the pupil of the bravest and wisest potentate in Europe.'

'At the affair of Bunderchang,' observed the Major, 'I asked for twelve volunteers, and every trooper in the ranks replied to my appeal. But a gaming party is not the same thing as a regiment under fire. You may be pleased, I suppose, to have found two, and two who will not fail you at a push. As for the pair who ran away, I count them among the most pitiful hounds I ever met with. Lieutenant Rich,' he added, addressing Brackenbury, 'I have heard much of you of late; and I cannot doubt but you have also heard of me. I am Major O'Rooke.'

And the veteran tendered his hand, which was red and tremulous, to the young Lieutenant.

'Who has not?' answered Brackenbury.

'When this little matter is settled,' said Mr Morris, 'you will think I have sufficiently rewarded you; for I could offer neither a more valuable service than to make him acquainted with the other.'

'And now,' said Major O'Rooke, 'is it a duel?'

'A duel after a fashion,' replied Mr Morris, 'a duel with unknown and dangerous enemies, and, as I gravely fear, a duel to the death. I must ask

you,' he continued, 'to call me Morris no longer; call me, if you please, Hammersmith; my real name, as well as that of another person to whom I hope to present you before long, you will gratify me by not asking and not seeking to discover for yourselves. Three days ago the person of whom I speak disappeared suddenly from home; and, until this morning, I received no hint of his situation. You will fancy my alarm when I tell you that he is engaged upon a work of private justice. Bound by an unhappy oath, too lightly sworn, he finds it necessary, without the help of law, to rid the earth of an insidious and bloody villain. Already two of our friends, and one of them my own born brother, have perished in the enterprise. He himself, or I am much deceived, is taken in the same fatal toils. But at least he still lives and still hopes, as this billet sufficiently proves.'

And the speaker, no other than Colonel Geraldine, proffered a letter, thus conceived:—

> Major Hammersmith,— On Wednesday, at 3 A.M., you will be admitted by the small door to the gardens of Rochester House, Regent's Park, by a man who is entirely in my interest. I must request you not to fail me by a second. Pray bring my case of swords, and, if you can find them, one or two gentlemen of conduct and discretion to whom my person is unknown. My name must not be used in this affair.
>
> T.GODALL

'From his wisdom alone, if he had no other title,' pursued Golonel Geraldine, when the others had each satisfied his curiosity, 'my friend is a man whose directions should implicitly be followed. I need not tell you, therefore, that I have not so much as visited the neighborhood of Rochester House; and that I am still as wholly in the dark as either of yourselves as to the nature of my friend's dilemma. I betook myself, as soon as I had received this order, to a furnishing contractor, and, in a few hours, the house in which we now are had assumed its late air of festival. My scheme was at least original; and I am far from regretting an action which has procured me the services of Major O'Rooke and Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich. But the servants in the street will have a strange awakening. The house which this evening was full of lights and visitors they will find uninhabited and for sale to-morrow morning. Thus even the most serious concerns,' added the Colonel, 'have a merry side.'

'And let us add a merry ending,' said Brackenbury.

The Colonel consulted his watch.

‘It is now hard on two,’ he said. ‘We have an hour before us, and a swift cab is at the door. Tell me if I may count upon your help.’

‘During a long life,’ replied Major O’Rooke, ‘I never took back my hand from anything, nor so much as hedged a bet.’

Brackenbury signified his readiness in the most becoming terms; and after they had drunk a glass or two of wine, the Colonel gave each of them a loaded revolver, and the three mounted into the cab and drove off for the address in question.

Rochester House was a magnificent residence on the banks of the canal. The large extent of the garden isolated it in an unusual degree from the annoyances of neighbourhood. It seemed the *parc aux cerfs* of some great nobleman or millionaire. As far as could be seen from the street, there was not a glimmer of light in any of the numerous windows of the mansion; and the place had a look of neglect, as though the master had been long from home.

The cab was discharged, and the three gentlemen were not long in discovering the small door, which was a sort of postern in a lane between two garden walls. It still wanted ten or fifteen minutes of the appointed time, the rain fell heavily, and the adventurers sheltered themselves below some pendent ivy, and spoke in low tones of the approaching trial.

Suddenly Geraldine raised his finger to command silence, and all three bent their hearing to the utmost. Through the continuous noise of the rain, the steps and voices of two men became audible from the other side of the wall; and, as they drew nearer, Brackenbury, whose sense of hearing was remarkably acute, could even distinguish some fragments of their talk.

‘Is the grave dug?’ asked one.

‘It is,’ replied the other; ‘behind the laurel hedge. When the job is done, we can cover it with a pile of stakes.’

The first speaker laughed, and the sound of his merriment was shocking to the listeners on the other side.

‘In an hour from now,’ he said.

And by the sound of the steps it was obvious that the pair had separated, and were proceeding in contrary directions.

Almost immediately after the postern door was cautiously opened, a white face was protruded into the lane, and a hand was seen beckoning to the watchers. In dead silence the three passed the door, which was

immediately locked behind them, and followed their guide through several garden alleys to the kitchen entrance of the house. A single candle burned in the great paved kitchen, which was destitute of the customary furniture; and as the party proceeded to ascend from thence by a flight of winding stairs, a prodigious noise of rats testified still more plainly to the dilapidation of the house.

Their conductor preceded them, carrying the candle. He was a lean man, much bent, but still agile; and he turned from time to time and admonished silence and caution by his gestures. Colonel Geraldine followed on his heels, the case of swords under one arm, and a pistol ready in the other. Brackenbury's heart beat thickly. He perceived that they were still in time; but he judged from the alacrity of the old man that the hour of action must be near at hand; the circumstances of this adventure were so obscure and menacing, the place seemed so well chosen for the darkest acts, that an older man than Brackenbury might have been pardoned a measure of emotion as he closed the procession up the winding stair.

At the top the guide threw open a door and ushered the three officers before him into a small apartment, lighted by a smoky lamp and the glow of a modest fire. At the chimney corner sat a man in the early prime of life, and of a stout but courtly and commanding appearance. His attitude and expression were those of the most unmoved composure; he was smoking a cheroot with much enjoyment and deliberation, and on a table by his elbow stood a long glass of some effervescing beverage which diffused an agreeable odor through the room.

'Welcome,' said he, extending his hand to Colonel Geraldine. 'I knew I might count on your exactitude.'

'On my devotion,' replied the Colonel, with a bow.

'Present me to your friends,' continued the first; and, when that ceremony had been performed, 'I wish, gentlemen,' he added, with the most exquisite affability, 'that I could offer you a more cheerful programme; it is ungracious to inaugurate an acquaintance upon serious affairs; but the compulsion of events is stronger than the obligations of good-fellowship. I hope and believe you will be able to forgive me this unpleasant evening; and for men of your stamp it will be enough to know that you are conferring a considerable favour.'

‘Your Highness,’ said the Major, ‘must pardon my bluntness. I am unable to hide what I know. For some time back I have suspected Major Hammersmith, but Mr Godall is unmistakable. To seek two men in London unacquainted with Prince Florizel of Bohemia was to ask too much at Fortune’s hands.’

‘Prince Florizel!’ cried Brackenbury in amazement.

And he gazed with the deepest interest on the features of the celebrated personage before him.

‘I shall not lament the loss of my incognito,’ remarked the Prince, ‘for it enables me to thank you with the more authority. You would have done as much for Mr Godall, I feel sure, as for the Prince of Bohemia; but the latter can perhaps do more for you. The gain is mine,’ he added, with a courteous gesture.

And the next moment he was conversing with the two officers about the Indian army and the native troops, a subject on which, as on all others, he had a remarkable fund of information and the soundest views.

There was something so striking in this man’s attitude at a moment of deadly peril that Brackenbury was overcome with respectful admiration; nor was he less sensible to the charm of his conversation or the surprising amenity of his address. Every gesture, every intonation, was not only noble in itself, but seemed to ennoble the fortunate mortal for whom it was intended; and Brackenbury confessed to himself with enthusiasm that this was a sovereign for whom a brave man might thankfully lay down his life.

Many minutes had thus passed, when the person who had introduced them into the house, and who had sat ever since in a corner, and with his watch in his hand, arose and whispered a word into the Prince’s ear.

‘It is well, Dr Noel,’ replied Florizel, aloud; and then addressing the others, ‘You will excuse me, gentlemen,’ he added, ‘if I have to leave you in the dark. The moment now approaches.’

Dr Noel extinguished the lamp. A faint, gray light, premonitory to the dawn, illuminated the window, but was not sufficient to illuminate the room; and when the Prince rose to his feet, it was impossible to distinguish his features or to make a guess at the nature of the emotion which obviously affected him as he spoke. He moved towards the door, and placed himself at one side of it in an attitude of the wariest attention.

‘You will have the kindness,’ he said, ‘to maintain the strictest silence, and to conceal yourselves in the densest of the shadow.’

The three officers and the physician hastened to obey, and for nearly ten minutes the only sound in Rochester House was occasioned by the excursions of the rats behind the woodwork. At the end of that period, a loud creak of a hinge broke in with surprising distinctness on the silence; and shortly after, the watchers could distinguish a slow and cautious tread approaching up the kitchen stair. At every second step the intruder seemed to pause and lend an ear, and during these intervals, which seemed of an incalculable duration, a profound disquiet possessed the spirit of the listeners. Dr Noel, accustomed as he was to dangerous emotions, suffered an almost pitiful physical prostration; his breath whistled in his lungs, his teeth grated one upon another, and his joints cracked aloud as he nervously shifted his position.

At last a hand was laid upon the door, and the bolt shot back with a slight report. There followed another pause, during which Brackenbury could see the Prince draw himself together noiselessly as if for some unusual exertion. Then the door opened, letting in a little more of the light of the morning; and the figure of a man appeared upon the threshold and stood motionless. He was tall, and carried a knife in his hand. Even in the twilight they could see his upper teeth bare and glistening, for his mouth was open like that of a hound about to leap. The man had evidently been over the head in water but a minute or two before; and even while he stood there the drops kept falling from his wet clothes and pattered on the floor.

The next moment he crossed the threshold. There was a leap, a stifled cry, an instantaneous struggle; and before Colonel Geraldine could spring to his aid, the Prince held the man, disarmed and helpless, by the shoulders.

‘Dr Noel,’ he said, ‘you will be so good as to relight the lamp.’

And relinquishing the charge of his prisoner to Geraldine and Brackenbury, he crossed the room and set his back against the chimney-piece. As soon as the lamp had kindled, the party beheld an unaccustomed sternness on the Prince’s features. It was no longer Florizel, the careless gentleman; it was the Prince of Bohemia, justly incensed and full of deadly purpose, who now raised his head and addressed the captive President of the Suicide Club.

‘President,’ he said, ‘you have laid your last snare, and your own feet are taken in it. The day is beginning; it is your last morning. You have just swum the Regent’s Canal; it is your last bath in this world. Your old accomplice, Dr Noel, so far from betraying me, has delivered you into my hands for judgment. And the grave you had dug for me this afternoon shall serve, in God’s almighty providence, to hide your own just doom from the curiosity of mankind. Kneel and pray, sir, if you have a mind that way; for your time is short, and God is weary of your iniquities.’

The President made no answer either by word or sign; but continued to hang his head and gaze sullenly on the floor, as though he were conscious of the Prince’s prolonged and unsparing regard.

‘Gentlemen,’ continued Florizel, resuming the ordinary tone of his conversation, ‘this is a fellow who has long eluded me, but whom, thanks to Dr Noel, I now have tightly by the heels. To tell the story of his misdeeds would occupy more time than we can now afford; but if the canal had contained nothing but the blood of his victims, I believe the wretch would have been no drier than you see him. Even in an affair of this sort I desire to preserve the forms of honour. But I make you the judges, gentlemen – this is more an execution than a duel; and to give the rogue his choice of weapons would be to push too far a point of etiquette. I cannot afford to lose my life in such a business,’ he continued, unlocking the case of swords, ‘and as a pistol-bullet travels so often on the wings of chance, and skill and courage may fall by the most trembling marksman, I have decided, and I feel sure you will approve my determination, to put this question to the touch of swords.’

When Brackenbury and Major O’Rooke, to whom these remarks were particularly addressed, had each intimated his approval, ‘Quick, sir,’ added Prince Florizel to the President, ‘choose a blade and do not keep me waiting; I have an impatience to be done with you for ever.’

For the first time since he was captured and disarmed the President raised his head, and it was plain that he began instantly to pluck up courage.

‘Is it to be stand up?’ he asked eagerly, ‘and between you and me?’

‘I mean so far to honour you,’ replied the Prince.

‘Oh, come,’ cried the President. ‘With a fair field, who knows how things may happen? I must add that I consider it handsome behaviour on your

Highness's part; and if the worst comes to the worst I shall die by one of the most gallant gentlemen in Europe.

And the President, liberated by those who had detained him, stepped up to the table and began, with minute attention, to select a sword. He was highly elated, and seemed to feel no doubt that he should issue victorious from the contest. The spectators grew alarmed in the face of so entire a confidence, and adjured Prince Florizel to reconsider his intention.

'It is but a farce,' he answered; 'and I think I can promise you, gentlemen, that it will not be long a-playing.'

'Your Highness will be careful not to over reach,' said Colonel Geraldine.

'Geraldine,' returned the Prince, 'did you ever know me fail in a debt of honour? I owe you this man's death, and you shall have it.'

The President at last satisfied himself with one of the rapiers, and signified his readiness by a gesture that was not devoid of a rude nobility. The nearness of peril, and the sense of courage, even to this obnoxious villain, lent an air of manhood and a certain grace.

The Prince helped himself at random to a sword.

'Colonel Geraldine and Doctor Noel,' he said, 'will have the goodness to await me in this room. I wish no personal friend of mine to be involved in this transaction. Major O'Rooke, you are a man of some years and a settled reputation – let me recommend the President to your good graces. Lieutenant Rich will be so good as to lend me his attentions: a young man cannot have too much experience in such affairs.'

'Your Highness,' replied Brackenbury, 'it is an honour I shall prize extremely.'

'It is well,' returned Prince Florizel; 'I shall hope to stand your friend in more important circumstances.'

And so saying he led the way out of the apartment and down the kitchen stairs.

The two men who were thus left alone threw open the window and leaned out, straining every sense to catch an indication of the tragical events that were about to follow. The rain was now over; day had almost come, and the birds were piping in the shrubbery and on the forest trees of the garden. The Prince and his companions were visible for a moment as they followed an alley between two flowering thickets; but at the first corner a clump of foliage intervened, and they were again concealed from view. This

was all that the Colonel and the physician had an opportunity to see, and the garden was so vast, and the place of combat evidently so remote from the house that not even the noise of sword-play reached their ears.

‘He has taken him towards the grave,’ said Dr Noel, with a shudder.

‘God,’ cried the Colonel, ‘God defend the right!’

And they awaited the event in silence, the Doctor shaking with fear, the Colonel in an agony of sweat. Many minutes must have elapsed, the day was sensibly broader, and the birds were singing more heartily in the garden before a sound of returning footsteps recalled their glances towards the door. It was the Prince and the two Indian officers who entered. God had defended the right.

‘I am ashamed of my emotion,’ said Prince Florizel; ‘I feel it a weakness unworthy of my station, but the continued existence of that hound of hell had begun to play upon me like a disease, and his death has more refreshed me than a night of slumber. Look, Geraldine,’ he continued, throwing his sword upon the floor, ‘there is the blood of the man who killed your brother. It should be a welcome sight. And yet,’ he added, ‘see how strangely we men are made! my revenge is not yet five minutes old, and already I am beginning to ask myself if even revenge be attainable on this precarious stage of life. The ill he did, who can undo it? The career in which he amassed a huge fortune (for the house itself in which he stayed belonged to him) – that career is now a part of the destiny of mankind forever; and I might weary myself making thrusts in carte until the crack of judgment, and Geraldine’s brother would be none the less dead, and a thousand other innocent persons would be none the less dishonoured and debauched! The existence of a man is so small a thing to take, so mighty a thing to employ! Alas!’ he cried, ‘is there anything in life so disenchanting as attainment?’

‘God’s justice has been done,’ replied the Doctor. ‘So much I behold. The lesson, your Highness, has been a cruel one for me; and I await my own turn with deadly apprehension.’

‘What was I saying?’ cried the Prince. ‘I have punished, and here is the man beside us who can help me to undo. Ah, Dr Noel! you and I have before us many a day of hard and honourable toil; and perhaps, before we have done, you may have more than redeemed your early errors.’

‘And in the meantime,’ said the Doctor, ‘let me go and bury my oldest friend.’

(*And this*, observes the erudite Arabian, *is the fortunate conclusion of the tale. The Prince, it is superfluous to mention, forgot none of those who served him in this great exploit; and to this day his authority and influence help them forward in their public career, while his condescending friendship adds a charm to their private life. To collect*, continues the author, *all the strange events in which this Prince has played the part of Providence were to fill the habitable globe with books. But the stories which relate to the fortunes of* THE RAJAH'S DIAMOND *are of too entertaining a description*, says he, *to be omitted.*.)

Thrawn Janet

The Reverend Murdoch Soulis was long minister of the moorland parish of Balweary, in the vale of Dule. A severe, bleak-faced old man, dreadful to his hearers, he dwelt in the last years of his life, without relative or servant or any human company, in the small and lonely manse under the Hanging Shaw. In spite of the iron composure of his features, his eye was wild, scared, and uncertain; and when he dwelt, in private admonitions, on the future of the impenitent, it seemed as if his eye pierced through the storms of time to the terrors of eternity. Many young persons, coming to prepare themselves against the season of the Holy Communion, were dreadfully affected by his talk. He had a sermon on 1st Peter, v. and 8th, 'The devil as a roaring lion', on the Sunday after every seventeenth of August, and he was accustomed to surpass himself upon that text both by the appalling nature of the matter and the terror of his bearing in the pulpit. The children were frightened into fits, and the old looked more than usually oracular, and were, all that day, full of those hints that Hamlet deprecated. The manse itself, where it stood by the water of Dule among some thick trees, with the Shaw overhanging it on the one side, and on the other many cold, moorish hill-tops rising towards the sky, had begun, at a very early period of Mr Soulis's ministry, to be avoided in the dusk hours by all who valued themselves upon their prudence; and guidmen sitting at the clachan alehouse shook their heads together at the thought of passing late by that uncanny neighbourhood. There was one spot, to be more particular, which was regarded with especial awe. The manse stood between the high-road and the water of Dule, with a gable to each; its back was towards the kirktown of Balweary, nearly half a mile away; in front of it, a bare garden, hedged with thorn, occupied the land between the river and the road. The house was two storeys high, with two large rooms on each. It opened not directly on the garden, but on a causewayed path, or passage, giving on the

road on the one hand, and closed on the other by the tall willows and elders that bordered on the stream. And it was this strip of causeway that enjoyed among the young parishioners of Balweary so infamous a reputation. The minister walked there often after dark, sometimes groaning aloud in the instancy of his unspoken prayers; and when he was from home, and the manse door was locked, the more daring schoolboys ventured, with beating hearts, to 'follow my leader' across that legendary spot.

This atmosphere of terror, surrounding, as it did, a man of God of spotless character and orthodoxy, was a common cause of wonder and subject of inquiry among the few strangers who were led by chance or business into that unknown, outlying country. But many even of the people of the parish were ignorant of the strange events which had marked the first year of Mr Soulis's ministrations; and among those who were better informed, some were naturally reticent, and others shy of that particular topic. Now and again, only, one of the older folk would warn into courage over his third tumbier, and recount the cause of the minister's strange looks and solitary life.

'Fifty years syne, when Mr Soulis cam' first into Ba'weary, he was still a young man – a callant, the folk said – fu' o' book learnin' and grand at the exposition, but, as was natural in sae young a man, wi' nae leevin' experience in religion. The younger sort were greatly taken wi' his gifts and his gab; but auld, concerned, serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill-supplied. It was before the days o' the moderates – weary fa' them; but ill things are like guid – they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folk even then that said the Lord had left the college professors to their ain devices, an' the lads that went to study wi' them wad hae done mair and better sittin' in a peat-bog, like their forbears of the persecution, wi' a Bible under their oxter and a speerit o' prayer in their heart. There was nae doubt, onyway, but that Mr Soulis had been ower lang at the college. He was careful and troubled for mony things besides the ae thing needful. He had a feck o' books wi' him – mair than had ever been seen before in a' that presbytery; and a sair wark the carrier had wi' them, for they were a' like to have smoored in the Deil's Hag between this and Kilmackerlie. They were books o' divinity, to be sure, or so they ca'd them; but the serious were o' opinion there was little service

for sae mony, when the hail o' God's Word would gang in the neuk of a plaid. Then he wad sit half the day and half the nicht forbye, which was scant decent – writin', nae less; and first, they were feared he wad read his sermons; and syne it proved he was writin' a book himsel', which was surely no fittin' for ane of his years and sma' experience.

Onyway it behoved him to get an auld, decent wife to keep the manse for him an' see to his bit denners; and he was recommended to an auld limmer – Janet M'Clour, they ca'ed her – and sae far left to himsel' as to be ower persuaded. There was mony advised him to the contrar, for Janet was mair than suspeckit by the best folk in Ba'weary. Lang or that, she had had a wean to a dragoon; she hadnae come forrit for maybe thretty year; and bairns had seen her mumblin' to hersel' up on Key's Loan in the gloamin', whilk was an unco time an' place for a God-fearin' woman. Howsoever, it was the laird himsel' that had first tauld the minister o' Janet; and in thae days he wad have gane a far gate to pleesure the laird. When folk tauld him that Janet was sib to the deil, it was a' superstition by his way of it; an' when they cast up the Bible to him an' the witch of Endor, he wad threep it doun their thrapples that thir days were a' gane by, and the deil was mercifully restrained.

Weel, when it got about the clachan that Janet M'Clour was to be servant at the manse, the folk were fair mad wi' her an' him thegether; and some o' the guidwives had nae better to dae than get round her door cheeks and chairge her wi' a' that was ken't again her, frae the sodger's bairn to John Tamson's twa kye. She was nae great speaker; folk usually let her gang her ain gate, an' she let them gang theirs, wi' neither Fair-guid-een nor Fair-guid-day; but when she buckled to, she had a tongue to deave the miller. Up she got, an' there wasnae an auld story in Ba'weary but she gart somebody lowp for it that day; they couldnae say ae thing but she could say twa to it; till, at the hinder end, the guidwives up and claught haud of her, and clawed the coats aff her back, and pu'd her doun the clachan to the water o' Dule, to see if she were a witch or no, soum or droun. The carline skirled till ye could hear her at the Hangin' Shaw, and she focht like ten; there was mony a guidwife bure the mark of her neist day an' mony a lang day after; and just in the hettest o' the collieshangie, wha suld come up (for his sins) but the new minister.

‘Women,’ said he (and he had a grand voice), ‘I charge you in the Lord’s name to let her go.’

Janet ran to him – she was fair wud wi’ terror – an’ clang to him, an’ prayed him, for Christ’s sake, save her frae the cummers; an’ they, for their pairt, tauld him a’ that was ken’t, and maybe mair.

‘Woman,’ says he to Janet, ‘is this true?’

‘As the Lord sees me,’ says she, ‘as the Lord made me, no a word o’t. Forbye the bairn,’ says she, ‘I ’ve been a decent woman a’ my days.’

‘Will you,’ says Mr Soulis, ‘in the name of God, and before me, His unworthy minister, renounce the devil and his works?’

Weel, it wad appear that when he askit that, she gave a girn that fairly frichtit them that saw her, an’ they could hear her teeth play dirl thegither in her chafts; but there was naething for it but the ae way or the ither; an’ Janet lifted up her hand and renounced the deil before them a’.

‘And now,’ says Mr Soulis to the guidwives, ‘home with ye, one and all, and pray to God for His forgiveness.’

And he gied Janet his arm, though she had little on her but a sark, and took her up the clachan to her ain door like a leddy of the land; an’ her scrieghin’ and laughin’ as was a scandal to be heard.

There were mony grave folk lang ower their prayers that nicht; but when the morn cam’ there was sic a fear fell upon a’ Ba’weary that the bairns hid theirsels, and even the men folk stood and keekit frae their doors. For there was Janet comin’ doun the clachan – her or her likeness, nane could tell – wi’ her neck thrawn, and her heid on ae side, like a body that has been hangit, and a girn on her face like an unstreakit corp. By an’ by they got used wi’ it, and even speered at her to ken what was wrang; but frae that day forth she couldnae speak like a Christian woman, but slavered and played click wi’ her teeth like a pair o’ shears; and frae that day forth the name o’ God cam’ never on her lips. Whiles she wad try to say it, but it michtnae be. Them that kenned best said least; but they never gied that Thing the name o’ Janet M’Clour; for the auld Janet, by their way o’t, was in muckle hell that day. But the minister was neither to haud or to bind; he preached about naething but the folk’s cruelty that had gi’en her a stroke of the palsy; he skelpt the bairns that meddled her; and he had her up to the manse that same nicht, and dwalled there a’ his lane wi’ her under the Hangin’ Shaw.

Weel, time gaed by: and the idler sort commenced to think mair lichtly o' that black business. The minister was weel thocht o'; he was aye late at the writing, folk wad see his can'le doon by the Dule water after twal' at e'en; and he seemed pleased wi' himsel' and upsitten as at first, though a' body could see that he was dwining. As for Janet she cam' an' she gaed; if she didnae speak muckle afore, it was reason she should speak less then; she meddled naebody; but she was an eldritch thing to see, an' nane wad hae mistrysted wi' her for Ba'weary glebe.

About the end o' July there cam' a spell o' weather, the like o't never was in that country-side; it was lown an' het an' heartless; the herds couldnae win up the Black Hill, the bairns were ower weariet to play; an' yet it was gousty too, wi' claps o' het wund that rummled in the glens, and bits o' shouers that slockened naething. We aye thocht it but to thun'er on the morn; but the morn cam', an' the morn's morning, and it was aye the same uncanny weather, sair on folks and bestial. Of a' that were the waur, nane suffered like Mr Soulis; he could neither sleep nor eat, he tauld his elders; an' when he wasnae writin' at his weary book, he wad be stravaguin' ower a' the country-side like a man possessed, when a' body else was blythe to keep caller ben the house.

Abune Hangin' Shaw, in the bield o' the Black Hill, there's a bit enclosed grund wi' an iron yett; and it seems, in the auld days, that was the kirkyaird o' Ba'weary, and consecrated by the Papists before the blessed licht shone upon the kingdom. It was a great howff, o' Mr Soulis's onyway; there he would sit an' consider his sermons; and inded it's a bieldy bit. Weel, as he cam' ower the wast end o' the Black Hill, ae day, he saw first twa, an' syne fower, an' syne seeven corbie craws fleein' round an' round abune the auld kirkyaird. They flew laigh and heavy, an' squawked to ither as they gaed; and it was clear to Mr Soulis that something had put them frae their ordinar. He wasnae easy fleyed, an' gaed straucht up to the wa's; and what suld he find there but a man, or the appearance of a man, sittin' in the inside upon a grave. He was of a great stature, an' black as hell, and his e'en were singular to see. Mr Soulis had heard tell o' black men, mony's the time; but there was something unco about this black man that daunted him. Het as he was, he took a kind o' cauld grue in the marrow o' his banes; but up he spak for a' that; an' says he: 'My friend, are you a stranger in this place?' The black man answered never a word; he got upon his feet, an' begude to hirsle

to the wa' on the far side; but he aye lookit at the minister; an' the minister stood an' lookit back; till a' in a meenute the black man was ower the wa' an' rinnin' for the bield o' the trees. Mr Soulis, he hardly kenned why, ran after him; but he was sair forjaskit wi' his walk an' the het, unhalesome weather; and rin as he likit, he got nae mair than a glisk o' the black man amang the birks, till he won doun to the foot o' the hillside, an' there he saw him ance mair, gaun, hap, step, an' lowp, ower Dule water to the manse.

Mr Soulis wasnae weel pleased that this fearsome gangrel suld mak' sae free wi' Ba'weary manse; an' he ran the harder, an' wet shoon, ower the burn, an' up the walk; but the deil a black man was there to see. He stepped out upon the road, but there was naebody there; he gaed a' ower the gairden, but na, nae black man. At the hinder end, and a bit feared as was but natural, he lifted the hasp and into the manse; and there was Janet M'Clour before his een, wi' her thrawn craig, and nane sae pleased to see him. And he aye minded sinsyne, when first he set his een upon her, he had the same cauld and deidly grue.

'Janet,' says he, 'have you seen a black man?'

'A black man!' quo' she. 'Save us a'! Ye're no wise, minister. There's nae black man in a' Ba'weary.'

But she didnae speak plain, ye maun understand; but yam-yammered, like a powny wi' the bit in its moo.

'Weel,' says he, 'Janet, if there was nae black man, I have spoken with the Accuser of the Brethren.'

An' he sat doun like ane wi' a fever, an' his teeth chittered in his heid.

'Hoots,' says she, 'think shame to yoursel', minister'; an' gied him a drap brandy that she keept aye by her.

Syne Mr Soulis gaed into his study amang a' his books. It's a lang, laigh, mirk chalmer, perishin' cauld in winter, an' no very dry even in the top o' the simmer, for the manse stands near the burn. Sae doun he sat, and thocht of a' that had come an' gane since he was in Ba'weary, an' his hame, an' the days when he was a bairn an' ran daffin' on the braes; and that black man aye ran in his heid like the owercome of a sang. Aye the mair he thocht, the mair he thocht o' the black man. He tried the prayer, an' the words wouldnae come to him; an' he tried, they say, to write at his book, but he couldnae mak' nae mair o' that. There was whiles he thocht the black man was at his oxter, an' the swat stood upon him cauld as well-water; and there

was other whiles, when he cam' to himsel' like a christened bairn and minded naething.

The upshot was that he gaed to the window an' stood glowrin' at Dule water. The trees are unco thick, an' the water lies deep an' black under the manse; and there was Janet washin' the cla'es wi' her coats kilted. She had her back to the minister, an' he, for his pairt, hardly kenned what he was lookin' at. Syne she turned round, an' shawed her face; Mr Soulis had the same cauld grue as twice that day afore, an' it was borne in upon him what folk said, that Janet was deid lang syne, an' this was a bogle in her clay-cauld flesh. He drew back a pickle and he scanned her narrowly. She was tramp-trampin' in the cla'es, croonin' to hersel'; and eh! Gude guide us, but it was a fearsome face. Whiles she sang louder, but there was nae man born o' woman that could tell the words o' her sang; an' whiles she lookit side-lang doun, but there was naething there for her to look at. There gaed a scunner through the flesh upon his banes; and that was Heeven's advertisement. But Mr Soulis just blamed himsel', he said, to think sae ill of a puir, auld afflicted wife that hadnae a freend forbye himsel'; an' he put up a bit prayer for him an' her, an' drank a little caller water – for his heart rose again the meat – an' gaed up to his naked bed in the gloaming.

That was a nicht that has never been forgotten in Ba'weary, the nicht o' the seeventeenth of August, seventeen hun'er' an' twal'. It had been het afore, as I hae said, but that nicht it was hetter than ever. The sun gaed doun amang unco-lookin' clouds; it fell as mirk as the pit; no a star, no a breath o' wund; ye couldnae see your han' afore your face, and even the auld folk cuist the covers frae their beds and lay pechin' for their breath. Wi' a' that he had upon his mind, it was gey and unlikely Mr Soulis wad get muckle sleep. He lay an' he tummled; the gude, caller bed that he got into brunt his very banes; whiles he slept, and whiles he waukened; whiles he heard the time o' nicht, and whiles a tyke yowlin' up the muir, as if somebody was deid; whiles he thocht he heard bogles claverin' in his lug, an' whiles he saw spunkies in the room. He behoved, he judged, to be sick; an' sick he was – little he jaloosed the sickness.

At the hinder end, he got a clearness in his mind, sat up in his sark on the bed-side, and fell thinkin' ance mair o' the black man an' Janet. He couldnae weel tell how – maybe it was the cauld to his feet – but it cam' in upon him wi' a spate that there was some connection between thir twa, an'

that either or baith o' them were bogles. And just at that moment, in Janet's room, which was neist to his, there cam' a stramp o' feet as if men were wars'lin', an' then a loud bang; an' then a wund gaed reishling round the fower quarters of the house; an' then a' was ance mair as seelent as the grave.

Mr Soulis was feared for neither man nor deevil. He got his tinder-box, an' lit a can'le, an' made three steps o't ower to Janet's door. It was on the hasp, an' he pushed it open, an' keeked bauldly in. It was a big room, as big as the minister's ain, an' plenished wi' grand, auld, solid gear, for he had naething else. There was a fowerposted bed wi' auld tapestry; and a braw cabinet of aik, that was fu' o' the minister's divinity books, an' put there to be out o' the gate; an' a wheen duds o' Janet's lying here and there about the floor. But nae Janet could Mr Soulis see; nor ony sign of a contention. In he gaed (an' there's few that wad ha'e followed him) an' lookit a' round, an' listened. But there was naething to be heard, neither inside the manse nor in a' Ba'weary parish, an' naething to be seen but the muckle shadows turnin' round the can'le. An' then, a' at ance, the minister's heart played dunt an' stood stock-still; an' a cauld wund blew amang the hairs o' his heid. Whaten a weary sicht was that for the puir man's een! For there was Janet hangin' frae a nail beside the auld aik cabinet: her heid aye lay on her shouther, her een were steeked, the tongue projeckit frae her mouth, and her heels were twa feet clear abune the floor.

'God forgive us all!' thocht Mr Soulis, 'poor Janet's dead.'

He cam' a step nearer to the corp; an' then his heart fair whammled in his inside. For by what cantrip it wad ill-beseem a man to judge, she was hingin' frae a single nail an' by a single wursted thread for darnin' hose.

It's a awfu' thing to be your lane at nicht wi' siccan prodigies o' darkness; but Mr Soulis was strong in the Lord. He turned an' gaed his ways oot o' that room, and lockit the door ahint him; and step by step, doun the stairs, as heavy as leed; and set doun the can'le on the table at the stairfoot. He couldnae pray, he couldnae think, he was dreepin' wi' caul' swat, an' naething could he hear but the dunt-dunt-duntin' o' his ain heart. He micht maybe have stood there an hour, or maybe twa, he minded sae little; when a' o' a sudden, he heard a laigh, uncanny steer up-stairs; a foot gaed to an' fro in the chalmer whaur the corp was hingin'; syne the door was opened, though he minded weel that he had lockit it; an' syne there was a step upon

the landin,' an' it seemed to him as if the corp was lookin' ower the rail and doun upon him whaur he stood.

He took up the can'le again (for he couldnae want the licht), and as saftly as ever he could, gaed straucht out o' the manse an' to the far end o' the causeway. It was aye pit-mirk; the flame o' the can'le, when he set it on the grund, brunt steedy and clear as in a room; naething moved, but the Dule water seepin' and sabbin' doun the glen, an' yon unhaly footstep that cam' ploddin' doun the stairs inside the manse. He kenned the foot ower weel, for it was Janet's; and at ilka step that cam' a wee thing nearer, the cauld got deeper in his vitals. He commended his soul to Him that made an' keepit him; 'and O Lord,' said he, 'give me strength this night to war against the powers of evil.'

By this time the foot was comin' through the passage for the door; he could hear a hand skirt alang the wa', as if the fearsome thing was feelin' for its way. The saughs tossed an' maned thegither, a long sigh cam' ower the hills, the flame o' the can'le was blawn aboot; an' there stood the corp of Thrawn Janet, wi' her grogram goun an' her black mutch, wi' the heid aye upon the shouther, an' the girn still upon the face o't – leevin', ye wad hae said – deid, as Mr Soulis weel kenned – upon the threshold o' the manse.

It's a strange thing that the saul of man should be that thirled into his perishable body; but the minister saw that, an' his heart didnae break.

She didnae stand there lang; she began to move again an' cam' slowly towards Mr Soulis whaur he stood under the saughs. A' the life o' his body, a' the strength o' his speerit, were glowerin' frae his een. It seemed she was gaun to speak, but wanted words, an' made a sign wi' the left hand. There cam' a clap o' wund, like a cat's fuff; oot gaed the can'le, the saughs skrieghed like folk; an' Mr Soulis kenned that, live or die, this was the end o't.

'Witch, beldame, devil!' he cried, 'I charge you, by the power of God, begone – if you be dead, to the grave – if you be damned, to hell.'

An' at that moment the Lord's ain hand out o' the Heevens struck the Horror whaur it stood; the auld, deid, desecrated corp o' the witch-wife, sae lang keepit frae the grave and hirsled round by deils, lowed up like a brunstane spunk and fell in ashes to the grund; the thunder followed, peal on dirling peal, the rairing rain upon the back o' that; and Mr Soulis lowped

through the garden hedge, and ran, wi' skelloch upon skelloch, for the clachan.

That same mornin', John Christie saw the Black Man pass the Muckle Cairn as it was chappin' six; before eicht, he gaed by the change-house at Knockdow; an' no lang after, Sandy M'Lellan saw him gaun linkin' doun the braes frae Kilmackerlie. There's little doubt but it was him that dwalled sae lang in Janet's body; but he was awa' at last; and sinsyne the deil has never fashed us in Ba'weary.

But it was a sair dispensation for the minister; lang, lang he lay ravin' in his bed; and frae that hour to this, he was the man ye ken the day.

The Body-Snatcher

Every night in the year, four of us sat in the small parlour of the George at Debenham – the undertaker, and the landlord, and Fettes, and myself. Sometimes there would be more; but blow high, blow low, come rain or snow or frost, we four would be each planted in his own particular arm-chair. Fettes was an old drunken Scotchman, a man of education obviously, and a man of some property, since he lived in idleness. He had come to Debenham years ago, while still young, and by a mere continuance of living had grown to be an adopted townsman. His blue camlet cloak was a local antiquity, like the church-spire. His place in the parlour at the George, his absence from church, his old, crapulous, disreputable vices, were all things of course in Debenham. He had some vague Radical opinions and some fleeting infidelities, which he would now and again set forth and emphasise with tottering slaps upon the table. He drank rum – five glasses regularly every evening; and for the greater portion of his nightly visit to the George sat, with his glass in his right hand, in a state of melancholy alcoholic saturation. We called him the Doctor, for he was supposed to have some special knowledge of medicine, and had been known, upon a pinch, to set a fracture or reduce a dislocation; but beyond these slight particulars, we had no knowledge of his character and antecedents.

One dark winter night – it had struck nine some time before the landlord joined us – there was a sick man in the George, a great neighbouring proprietor suddenly struck down with apoplexy on his way to Parliament; and the great man's still greater London doctor had been telegraphed to his bedside. It was the first time that such a thing had happened in Debenham, for the railway was but newly open, and we were all proportionately moved by the occurrence.

'He's come,' said the landlord, after he had filled and lighted his pipe.

'He?' said I. 'Who? – not the doctor?'

‘Himself,’ replied our host.

‘What is his name?’

‘Dr Macfarlane,’ said the landlord.

Fettes was far through his third tumbler, stupidly fuddled, now nodding over, now staring mazily around him; but at the last word he seemed to awaken, and repeated the name ‘Macfarlane’ twice, quietly enough the first time, but with sudden emotion at the second.

‘Yes,’ said the landlord, ‘that’s his name, Doctor Wolfe Macfarlane.’

Fettes became instantly sober; his eyes awoke, his voice became clear, loud, and steady, his language forcible and earnest. We were all startled by the transformation, as if a man had risen from the dead.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, ‘I am afraid I have not been paying much attention to your talk. Who is this Wolfe Macfarlane?’ And then, when he had heard the landlord out, ‘It cannot be, it cannot be,’ he added; ‘and yet I would like well to see him face to face.’

‘Do you know him, Doctor?’ asked the undertaker, with a gasp.

‘God forbid!’ was the reply. ‘And yet the name is a strange one; it were too much to fancy two. Tell me, landlord, is he old?’

‘Well,’ said the host, ‘he’s not a young man, to be sure, and his hair is white; but he looks younger than you.’

‘He is older, though; years older. But,’ with a slap upon the table, ‘it’s the rum you see in my face – rum and sin. This man, perhaps, may have an easy conscience and a good digestion. Conscience! Hear me speak. You would think I was some good, old, decent Christian, would you not? But no, not I; I never canted. Voltaire might have canted if he’d stood in my shoes, but the brains’ – with a rattling fillip on his bald head – ‘the brains were clear and active, and I saw and made no deductions.’

‘If you know this doctor,’ I ventured to remark, after a somewhat awful pause, ‘I should gather that you do not share the landlord’s good opinion.’

Fettes paid no regard to me.

‘Yes,’ he said, with sudden decision, ‘I must see him face to face.’

There was another pause, and then a door was closed rather sharply on the first floor, and a step was heard upon the stair.

‘That’s the doctor,’ cried the landlord. ‘Look sharp, and you can catch him.’

It was but two steps from the small parlour to the door of the old George Inn; the wide oak staircase landed almost in the street; there was room for a Turkey rug and nothing more between the threshold and the last round of the descent; but this little space was every evening brilliantly lit up, not only by the light upon the stair and the great signal-lamp below the sign, but by the warm radiance of the barroom window. The George thus brightly advertised itself to passers-by in the cold street. Fettes walked steadily to the spot, and we, who were hanging behind, beheld the two men meet, as one of them had phrased it, face to face. Dr Macfarlane was alert and vigorous. His white hair set off his pale and placid, although energetic, countenance. He was richly dressed in the finest of broadcloth and the whitest of linen, with a great gold watchchain, and studs and spectacles of the same precious material. He wore a broad-folded tie, white and speckled with lilac, and he carried on his arm a comfortable driving-coat of fur. There was no doubt but he became his years, breathing, as he did, of wealth and consideration; and it was a surprising contrast to see our parlour sot – bald, dirty, pimpled, and robed in his old camlet cloak – confront him at the bottom of the stairs.

'Macfarlane!' he said somewhat loudly, more like a herald than a friend.

The great doctor pulled up short on the fourth step, as though the familiarity of the address surprised and somewhat shocked his dignity.

'Toddy Macfarlane!' repeated Fettes.

The London man almost staggered. He stared for the swiftest of seconds at the man before him, glanced behind him with a sort of scare, and then in a startled whisper, 'Fettes!' he said, 'you!'

'Ay,' said the other, 'me! Did you think I was dead too? We are not so easy shut of our acquaintance.'

'Hush, hush!' exclaimed the doctor. 'Hush, hush! this meeting is so unexpected – I can see you are unmanned. I hardly knew you, I confess, at first; but I am overjoyed – overjoyed to have this opportunity. For the present it must be how-d'ye-do and good-by in one, for my fly is waiting, and I must not fail the train; but you shall – let me see – yes – you shall give me your address, and you can count on early news of me. We must do something for you, Fettes. I fear you are out at elbows; but we must see to that for auld lang syne, as once we sang at suppers.'

‘Money!’ cried Fettes; ‘money from you! The money that I had from you is lying where I cast it in the rain.’

Dr Macfarlane had talked himself into some measure of superiority and confidence, but the uncommon energy of this refusal cast him back into his first confusion.

A horrible, ugly look came and went across his almost venerable countenance. ‘My dear fellow,’ he said, ‘be it as you please; my last thought is to offend you. I would intrude on none. I will leave you my address, however—’

‘I do not wish it – I do not wish to know the roof that shelters you,’ interrupted the other. ‘I heard your name; I feared it might be you; I wished to know if, after all, there were a God; I know now that there is none. Begone!’

He still stood in the middle of the rug, between the stair and doorway; and the great London physician, in order to escape, would be forced to step to one side. It was plain that he hesitated before the thought of this humiliation. White as he was, there was a dangerous glitter in his spectacles; but while he still paused uncertain, he became aware that the driver of his fly was peering in from the street at this unusual scene and caught a glimpse at the same time of our little body from the parlour, huddled by the corner of the bar. The presence of so many witnesses decided him at once to flee. He crouched together, brushing on the wainscot, and made a dart like a serpent, striking for the door. But his tribulation was not yet entirely at an end, for even as he was passing Fettes clutched him by the arm and these words came in a whisper, and yet painfully distinct, ‘Have you seen it again?’

The great rich London doctor cried out aloud with a sharp, throttling cry; he dashed his questioner across the open space, and, with his hands over his head, fled out of the door like a detected thief. Before it had occurred to one of us to make a movement the fly was already rattling toward the station. The scene was over like a dream, but the dream had left proofs and traces of its passage. Next day the servant found the fine gold spectacles broken on the threshold, and that very night we were all standing breathless by the barroom window, and Fettes at our side, sober, pale and resolute in look.

‘God protect us, Mr Fettes!’ said the landlord, coming first into possession of his customary senses. ‘What in the universe is all this? These

are strange things you have been saying.'

Fettes turned toward us; he looked us each in succession in the face. 'See if you can hold your tongues,' said he. 'That man Macfarlane is not safe to cross; those that have done so already have repented it too late.'

And then, without so much as finishing his third glass, far less waiting for the other two, he bade us good-by and went forth, under the lamp of the hotel, into the black night.

We three turned to our places in the parlour, with the big red fire and four clear candles; and as we recapitulated what had passed the first chill of our surprise soon changed into a glow of curiosity. We sat late; it was the latest session I have known in the old George. Each man, before we parted, had his theory that he was bound to prove; and none of us had any nearer business in this world than to track out the past of our condemned companion, and surprise the secret that he shared with the great London doctor. It is no great boast, but I believe I was a better hand at worming out a story than either of my fellows at the George; and perhaps there is now no other man alive who could narrate to you the following foul and unnatural events.

In his young days Fettes studied medicine in the schools of Edinburgh. He had talent of a kind, the talent that picks up swiftly what it hears and readily retails it for its own. He worked little at home; but he was civil, attentive, and intelligent in the presence of his masters. They soon picked him out as a lad who listened closely and remembered well; nay, strange as it seemed to me when I first heard it, he was in those days well favoured, and pleased by his exterior. There was, at that period, a certain extramural teacher of anatomy, whom I shall here designate by the letter K. His name was subsequently too well known. The man who bore it skulked through the streets of Edinburgh in disguise, while the mob that applauded at the execution of Burke called loudly for the blood of his employer. But Mr K— was then at the top of his vogue; he enjoyed a popularity due partly to his own talent and address, partly to the incapacity of his rival, the university professor. The students, at least, swore by his name, and Fettes believed himself, and was believed by others, to have laid the foundations of success when he had acquired the favour of this meteorically famous man. Mr K— was a *bon vivant* as well as an accomplished teacher; he liked a sly illusion no less than a careful preparation. In both capacities Fettes enjoyed and

deserved his notice, and by the second year of his attendance he held the half-regular position of second demonstrator or sub-assistant in his class.

In this capacity, the charge of the theatre and lecture-room devolved in particular upon his shoulders. He had to answer for the cleanliness of the premises and the conduct of the other students, and it was a part of his duty to supply, receive, and divide the various subjects. It was with a view to this last – at that time very delicate – affair that he was lodged by Mr K— in the same wynd, and at last in the same building, with the dissecting-rooms. Here, after a night of turbulent pleasures, his hand still tottering, his sight still misty and confused, he would be called out of bed in the black hours before the winter dawn by the unclean and desperate interlopers who supplied the table. He would open the door to these men, since infamous throughout the land. He would help them with their tragic burden, pay them their sordid price, and remain alone, when they were gone, with the unfriendly relics of humanity. From such a scene he would return to snatch another hour or two of slumber, to repair the abuses of the night, and refresh himself for the labours of the day.

Few lads could have been more insensible to the impressions of a life thus passed among the ensigns of mortality. His mind was closed against all general considerations. He was incapable of interest in the fate and fortunes of another, the slave of his own desires and low ambitions. Cold, light, and selfish in the last resort, he had that modicum of prudence, miscalled morality, which keeps a man from inconvenient drunkenness or punishable theft. He coveted, besides, a measure of consideration from his masters and his fellow-pupils, and he had no desire to fail conspicuously in the external parts of life. Thus he made it his pleasure to gain some distinction in his studies, and day after day rendered unimpeachable eye-service to his employer, Mr K—. For his day of work he indemnified himself by nights of roaring, blackguardly enjoyment; and when that balance had been struck, the organ that he called his conscience declared itself content.

The supply of subjects was a continual trouble to him as well as to his master. In that large and busy class, the raw material of the anatomists kept perpetually running out; and the business thus rendered necessary was not only unpleasant in itself, but threatened dangerous consequences to all who were concerned. It was the policy of Mr K— to ask no questions in his dealings with the trade. ‘They bring the body, and we pay the price,’ he

used to say, dwelling on the alliteration – '*quid pro quo*.' And, again, and somewhat profanely, 'Ask no questions,' he would tell his assistants, 'for conscience sake.' There was no understanding that the subjects were provided by the crime of murder. Had that idea been broached to him in words, he would have recoiled in horror; but the lightness of his speech upon so grave a matter was, in itself, an offence against good manners, and a temptation to the men with whom he dealt. Fettes, for instance, had often remarked to himself upon the singular freshness of the bodies. He had been struck again and again by the hang-dog, abominable looks of the ruffians who came to him before the dawn; and putting things together clearly in his private thoughts, he perhaps attributed a meaning too immoral and too categorical to the unguarded counsels of his master. He understood his duty, in short, to have three branches: to take what was brought, to pay the price, and to avert the eye from any evidence of crime.

One November morning this policy of silence was put sharply to the test. He had been awake all night with a racking toothache – pacing his room like a caged beast or throwing himself in fury on his bed – and had fallen at last into that profound, uneasy slumber that so often follows on a night of pain, when he was awakened by the third or fourth angry repetition of the concerted signal. There was a thin, bright moonshine; it was bitter cold, windy, and frosty; the town had not yet awakened, but an indefinable stir already preluded the noise and business of the day. The ghouls had come later than usual, and they seemed more than usually eager to be gone. Fettes, sick with sleep, lighted them upstairs. He heard their grumbling Irish voices through a dream; and as they stripped the sack from their sad merchandise he leaned dozing, with his shoulder propped against the wall; he had to shake himself to find the men their money. As he did so his eyes lighted on the dead face. He started; he took two steps nearer, with the candle raised.

'God Almighty!' he cried. 'That is Jane Galbraith!'

The men answered nothing, but they shuffled nearer the door.

'I know her, I tell you,' he continued. 'She was alive and hearty yesterday. It's impossible she can be dead; it's impossible you should have got this body fairly.'

'Sure, sir, you're mistaken entirely,' said one of the men.

But the other looked Fettes darkly in the eyes, and demanded the money on the spot.

It was impossible to misconceive the threat or to exaggerate the danger. The lad's heart failed him. He stammered some excuses, counted out the sum, and saw his hateful visitors depart. No sooner were they gone than he hastened to confirm his doubts. By a dozen unquestionable marks he identified the girl he had jested with the day before. He saw, with horror, marks upon her body that might well betoken violence. A panic seized him, and he took refuge in his room. There he reflected at length over the discovery that he had made; considered soberly the bearing of Mr K—'s instructions and the danger to himself of interference in so serious a business, and at last, in sore perplexity, determined to wait for the advice of his immediate superior, the class assistant.

This was a young doctor, Wolfe Macfarlane, a high favourite among all the reckless students, clever, dissipated, and unscrupulous to the last degree. He had travelled and studied abroad. His manners were agreeable and a little forward. He was an authority on the stage, skilful on the ice or the links with skate or golf-club; he dressed with nice audacity, and, to put the finishing touch upon his glory, he kept a gig and a strong trotting-horse. With Fettes he was on terms of intimacy; indeed, their relative positions called for some community of life; and when subjects were scarce the pair would drive far into the country in Macfarlane's gig, visit and desecrate some lonely graveyard, and return before dawn with their booty to the door of the dissecting-room.

On that particular morning Macfarlane arrived somewhat earlier than his wont. Fettes heard him, and met him on the stairs, told him his story, and showed him the cause of his alarm. Macfarlane examined the marks on her body.

'Yes,' he said with a nod, 'it looks fishy.'

'Well, what should I do?' asked Fettes.

'Do?' repeated the other. 'Do you want to do anything? Least said soonest mended, I should say.'

'Some one else might recognise her,' objected Fettes. 'She was as well known as the Castle Rock.'

'We'll hope not,' said Macfarlane, 'and if anybody does – well, you didn't, don't you see, and there's an end. The fact is, this has been going on

too long. Stir up the mud, and you'll get K— into the most unholy trouble; you'll be in a shocking box yourself. So will I, if you come to that. I should like to know how any one of us would look, or what the devil we should have to say for ourselves, in any Christian witness-box. For me, you know there's one thing certain – that, practically speaking, all our subjects have been murdered.'

'Macfarlane!' cried Fettes.

'Come now!' sneered the other. 'As if you hadn't suspected it yourself!'

'Suspecting is one thing—'

'And proof another. Yes, I know; and I'm as sorry as you are this should have come here,' tapping the body with his cane. 'The next best thing for me is not to recognise it; and,' he added coolly, 'I don't. You may, if you please. I don't dictate, but I think a man of the world would do as I do; and I may add, I fancy that is what K— would look for at our hands. The question is, Why did he choose us two for his assistants? And I answer, because he didn't want old wives.'

This was the tone of all others to affect the mind of a lad like Fettes. He agreed to imitate Macfarlane. The body of the unfortunate girl was duly dissected, and no one remarked or appeared to recognise her.

One afternoon, when his day's work was over, Fettes dropped into a popular tavern and found Macfarlane sitting with a stranger. This was a small man, very pale and dark, with coal-black eyes. The cut of his features gave a promise of intellect and refinement which was but feebly realised in his manners, for he proved, upon a nearer acquaintance, coarse, vulgar, and stupid. He exercised, however, a very remarkable control over Macfarlane; issued orders like the Great Bashaw; became inflamed at the least discussion or delay, and commented rudely on the servility with which he was obeyed. This most offensive person took a fancy to Fettes on the spot, plied him with drinks, and honoured him with unusual confidences on his past career. If a tenth part of what he confessed were true, he was a very loathsome rogue; and the lad's vanity was tickled by the attention of so experienced a man.

'I'm a pretty bad fellow myself,' the stranger remarked, 'but Macfarlane is the boy— Toddy Macfarlane I call him. Toddy, order your friend another glass.' Or it might be, 'Toddy, you jump up and shut the door.' 'Toddy hates me,' he said again. 'Oh, yes, Toddy, you do!'

‘Don’t you call me that confounded name,’ growled Macfarlane.

‘Hear him! Did you ever see the lads play knife? He would like to do that all over my body,’ remarked the stranger.

‘We medicals have a better way than that,’ said Fettes. ‘When we dislike a dead friend of ours, we dissect him.’

Macfarlane looked up sharply, as though this jest were scarcely to his mind.

The afternoon passed. Gray, for that was the stranger’s name, invited Fettes to join them at dinner, ordered a feast so sumptuous that the tavern was thrown in commotion, and when all was done commanded Macfarlane to settle the bill. It was late before they separated; the man Gray was incapably drunk. Macfarlane, sobered by his fury, chewed the cud of the money he had been forced to squander and the slights he had been obliged to swallow. Fettes, with various liquors singing in his head, returned home with devious footsteps and a mind entirely in abeyance. Next day Macfarlane was absent from the class, and Fettes smiled to himself as he imagined him still squiring the intolerable Gray from tavern to tavern. As soon as the hour of liberty had struck he posted from place to place in quest of his last night’s companions. He could find them, however, nowhere; so returned early to his rooms, went early to bed, and slept the sleep of the just.

At four in the morning he was awakened by the well-known signal. Descending to the door, he was filled with astonishment to find Macfarlane with his gig, and in the gig one of those long and ghastly packages with which he was so well acquainted.

‘What?’ he cried. ‘Have you been out alone? How did you manage?’

But Macfarlane silenced him roughly, bidding him turn to business. When they had got the body upstairs and laid it on the table, Macfarlane made at first as if he were going away. Then he paused and seemed to hesitate; and then, ‘You had better look at the face,’ said he, in tones of some constraint. ‘You had better,’ he repeated, as Fettes only stared at him in wonder.

‘But where, and how, and when did you come by it?’ cried the other.

‘Look at the face,’ was the only answer.

Fettes was staggered; strange doubts assailed him. He looked from the young doctor to the body, and then back again. At last, with a start, he did

as he was bidden. He had almost expected the sight that met his eyes, and yet the shock was cruel. To see, fixed in the rigidity of death and naked on that coarse layer of sack-cloth, the man whom he had left well clad and full of meat and sin upon the threshold of a tavern, awoke, even in the thoughtless Fettes, some of the terrors of the conscience. It was a *cras tibi* which re-echoed in his soul, that two whom he had known should have come to lie upon these icy tables. Yet these were only secondary thoughts. His first concern regarded Wolfe. Unprepared for a challenge so momentous, he knew not how to look his comrade in the face. He durst not meet his eye, and he had neither words nor voice at his command.

It was Macfarlane himself who made the first advance. He came up quietly behind and laid his hand gently but firmly on the other's shoulder.

'Richardson,' said he, 'may have the head.'

Now Richardson was a student who had long been anxious for that portion of the human subject to dissect. There was no answer, and the murderer resumed: 'Talking of business, you must pay me; your accounts, you see, must tally.'

Fettes found a voice, the ghost of his own: 'Pay you!' he cried. 'Pay you for that?'

'Why, yes, of course you must. By all means and on every possible account, you must,' returned the other. 'I dare not give it for nothing, you dare not take it for nothing; it would compromise us both. This is another case like Jane Galbraith's. The more things are wrong the more we must act as if all were right. Where does old K— keep his money?'

'There,' answered Fettes hoarsely, pointing to a cupboard in the corner.

'Give me the key, then,' said the other, calmly, holding out his hand.

There was an instant's hesitation, and the die was cast. Macfarlane could not suppress a nervous twitch, the infinitesimal mark of an immense relief, as he felt the key between his fingers. He opened the cupboard, brought out pen and ink and a paper-book that stood in one compartment, and separated from the funds in a drawer a sum suitable to the occasion.

'Now, look here,' he said, 'there is the payment made – first proof of your good faith: first step to your security. You have now to clinch it by a second. Enter the payment in your book, and then you for your part may defy the devil.'

The next few seconds were for Fettes an agony of thought; but in balancing his terrors it was the most immediate that triumphed. Any future difficulty seemed almost welcome if he could avoid a present quarrel with Macfarlane. He set down the candle which he had been carrying all this time, and with a steady hand entered the date, the nature, and the amount of the transaction.

'And now,' said Macfarlane, 'it's only fair that you should pocket the lucre. I've had my share already. By the bye, when a man of the world falls into a bit of luck, has a few shillings extra in his pocket – I'm ashamed to speak of it, but there's a rule of conduct in the case. No treating, no purchase of expensive class-books, no squaring of old debts; borrow, don't lend.'

'Macfarlane,' began Fettes, still somewhat hoarsely, 'I have put my neck in a halter to oblige you.'

'To oblige me?' cried Wolfe. 'Oh, come! You did, as near as I can see the matter, what you downright had to do in self-defence. Suppose I got into trouble, where would you be? This second little matter flows clearly from the first. Mr Gray is the continuation of Miss Galbraith. You can't begin and then stop. If you begin, you must keep on beginning; that's the truth. No rest for the wicked.'

A horrible sense of blackness and the treachery of fate seized hold upon the soul of the unhappy student.

'My God!' he cried, 'but what have I done? and when did I begin? To be made a class assistant – in the name of reason, where's the harm in that? Service wanted the position; Service might have got it. Would *he* have been where *I* am now?'

'My dear fellow,' said Macfarlane, 'what a boy you are! What harm *has* come to you? What harm *can* come to you if you hold your tongue? Why, man, do you know what this life is? There are two squads of us – the lions and the lambs. If you're a lamb, you'll come to lie upon these tables like Gray or Jane Galbraith; if you're a lion, you'll live and drive a horse like me, like K—, like all the world with any wit or courage. You're staggered at the first. But look at K—! My dear fellow, you're clever, you have pluck. I like you, and K— likes you. You were born to lead the hunt; and I tell you, on my honour and my experience of life, three days from now you'll laugh at all these scarecrows like a high school boy at a farce.'

And with that Macfarlane took his departure and drove off up the wynd in his gig to get under cover before daylight. Fettes was thus left alone with his regrets. He saw the miserable peril in which he stood involved. He saw, with inexpressible dismay, that there was no limit to his weakness, and that, from concession to concession, he had fallen from the arbiter of Macfarlane's destiny to his paid and helpless accomplice. He would have given the world to have been a little braver at the time, but it did not occur to him that he might still be brave. The secret of Jane Galbraith and the cursed entry in the day-book closed his mouth.

Hours passed; the class began to arrive; the members of the unhappy Gray were dealt out to one and to another, and received without remark. Richardson was made happy with the head; and before the hour of freedom rang Fettes trembled with exultation to perceive how far they had already gone toward safety.

For two days he continued to watch, with increasing joy, the dreadful process of disguise.

On the third day Macfarlane made his appearance. He had been ill, he said; but he made up for lost time by the energy with which he directed the students. To Richardson in particular he extended the most valuable assistance and advice, and that student, encouraged by the praise of the demonstrator, burned high with ambitious hopes, and saw the medal already in his grasp.

Before the week was out Macfarlane's prophecy had been fulfilled. Fettes had outlived his terrors and had forgotten his baseness. He began to plume himself upon his courage, and had so arranged the story in his mind that he could look back on these events with an unhealthy pride. Of his accomplice he saw but little. They met, of course, in the business of the class; they received their orders together from Mr K—. At times they had a word or two in private, and Macfarlane was from first to last particularly kind and jovial. But it was plain that he avoided any reference to their common secret; and even when Fettes whispered to him that he had cast in his lot with the lions and foresworn the lambs, he only signed to him smilingly to hold his peace.

At length an occasion arose which threw the pair once more into a closer union. Mr K— was again short of subjects; pupils were eager, and it was a part of this teacher's pretensions to be always well supplied. At the same

time there came the news of a burial in the rustic graveyard of Glencorse. Time has little changed the place in question. It stood then, as now, upon a cross road, out of call of human habitations, and buried fathom deep in the foliage of six cedar trees. The cries of the sheep upon the neighbouring hills, the streamlets upon either hand, one loudly singing among pebbles, the other dripping furtively from pond to pond, the stir of the wind in mountainous old flowering chestnuts, and once in seven days the voice of the bell and the old tunes of the precentor, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence around the rural church. The Resurrection Man – to use a byname of the period – was not to be deterred by any of the sanctities of customary piety. It was part of his trade to despise and desecrate the scrolls and trumpets of old tombs, the paths worn by the feet of worshippers and mourners, and the offerings and the inscriptions of bereaved affection. To rustic neighbourhoods, where love is more than commonly tenacious, and where some bonds of blood or fellowship unite the entire society of a parish, the body-snatcher, far from being repelled by natural respect, was attracted by the ease and safety of the task. To bodies that had been laid in earth, in joyful expectation of a far different awakening, there came that hasty, lamp-lit, terror-haunted resurrection of the spade and mattock. The coffin was forced, the cerements torn, and the melancholy relics, clad in sackcloth, after being rattled for hours on moonless byways, were at length exposed to uttermost indignities before a class of gaping boys.

Somewhat as two vultures may swoop upon a dying lamb, Fettes and Macfarlane were to be let loose upon a grave in that green and quiet resting-place. The wife of a farmer, a woman who had lived for sixty years, and been known for nothing but good butter and a godly conversation, was to be rooted from her grave at midnight and carried, dead and naked, to that faraway city that she had always honoured with her Sunday's best; the place beside her family was to be empty till the crack of doom; her innocent and almost venerable members to be exposed to that last curiosity of the anatomist.

Late one afternoon the pair set forth, well wrapped in cloaks and furnished with a formidable bottle. It rained without remission – a cold, dense, lashing rain. Now and again there blew a puff of wind, but these sheets of falling water kept it down. Bottle and all, it was a sad and silent drive as far as Penicuik, where they were to spend the evening. They

stopped once, to hide their implements in a thick bush not far from the churchyard, and once again at the Fisher's Tryst, to have a toast before the kitchen fire and vary their nips of whisky with a glass of ale. When they reached their journey's end the gig was housed, the horse was fed and comforted, and the two young doctors in a private room sat down to the best dinner and the best wine the house afforded. The lights, the fire, the beating rain upon the window, the cold, incongruous work that lay before them, added zest to their enjoyment of the meal. With every glass their cordiality increased. Soon Macfarlane handed a little pile of gold to his companion.

'A compliment,' he said. 'Between friends these little d—d accommodations ought to fly like pipe-lights.'

Fettes pocketed the money, and applauded the sentiment to the echo. 'You are a philosopher,' he cried. 'I was an ass till I knew you. You and K— between you, by the Lord Harry! but you'll make a man of me.'

'Of course, we shall,' applauded Macfarlane. 'A man? I tell you, it required a man to back me up the other morning. There are some big, brawling, forty-year-old cowards who would have turned sick at the look of the d—d thing; but not you – you kept your head. I watched you.'

'Well, and why not?' Fettes thus vaunted himself. 'It was no affair of mine. There was nothing to gain on the one side but disturbance, and on the other I could count on your gratitude, don't you see?' And he slapped his pocket till the gold pieces rang.

Macfarlane somehow felt a certain touch of alarm at these unpleasant words. He may have regretted that he had taught his young companion so successfully, but he had no time to interfere, for the other noisily continued in this boastful strain:

'The great thing is not to be afraid. Now, between you and me, I don't want to hang – that's practical; but for all cant, Macfarlane, I was born with a contempt. Hell, God, Devil, right, wrong, sin, crime, and all the old gallery of curiosities – they may frighten boys, but men of the world, like you and me, despise them. Here's to the memory of Gray!'

It was by this time growing somewhat late. The gig, according to order, was brought round to the door with both lamps brightly shining, and the young men had to pay their bill and take the road. They announced that they were bound for Peebles, and drove in that direction till they were clear of the last houses of the town; then, extinguishing the lamps, returned upon

their course, and followed a by-road toward Glencorse. There was no sound but that of their own passage, and the incessant, strident pouring of the rain. It was pitch dark; here and there a white gate or a white stone in the wall guided them for a short space across the night; but for the most part it was at a foot pace, and almost groping, that they picked their way through that resonant blackness to their solemn and isolated destination. In the sunken woods that traverse the neighbourhood of the burying-ground the last glimmer failed them, and it became necessary to kindle a match and reillumine one of the lanterns of the gig. Thus, under the dripping trees, and environed by huge and moving shadows, they reached the scene of their unhallowed labours.

They were both experienced in such affairs, and powerful with the spade; and they had scarce been twenty minutes at their task before they were rewarded by a dull rattle on the coffin lid. At the same moment Macfarlane, having hurt his hand upon a stone, flung it carelessly above his head. The grave, in which they now stood almost to the shoulders, was close to the edge of the plateau of the graveyard; and the gig lamp had been propped, the better to illuminate their labours, against a tree, and on the immediate verge of the steep bank descending to the stream. Chance had taken a sure aim with the stone. Then came a clang of broken glass; night fell upon them; sounds alternately dull and ringing announced the bounding of the lantern down the bank, and its occasional collision with the trees. A stone or two, which it had dislodged in its descent, rattled behind it into the profundities of the glen; and then silence, like night, resumed its sway; and they might bend their hearing to its utmost pitch, but naught was to be heard except the rain, now marching to the wind, now steadily falling over miles of open country.

They were so nearly at an end of their abhorred task that they judged it wisest to complete it in the dark. The coffin was exhumed and broken open; the body inserted in the dripping sack and carried between them to the gig; one mounted to keep it in its place, and the other, taking the horse by the mouth, groped along by wall and bush until they reached the wider road by the Fisher’s Tryst. Here was a faint, diffused radiancy, which they hailed like daylight; by that they pushed the horse to a good pace and began to rattle along merrily in the direction of the town.

They had both been wetted to the skin during their operations, and now, as the gig jumped among the deep ruts, the thing that stood propped between them fell now upon one and now upon the other. At every repetition of the horrid contact each instinctively repelled it with the greater haste; and the process, natural although it was, began to tell upon the nerves of the companions. Macfarlane made some ill-favoured jest about the farmer's wife, but it came hollowly from his lips, and was allowed to drop in silence. Still their unnatural burden bumped from side to side; and now the head would be laid, as if in confidence, upon their shoulders, and now the drenching sackcloth would flap icily about their faces. A creeping chill began to possess the soul of Fettes. He peered at the bundle, and it seemed somehow larger than at first. All over the countryside, and from every degree of distance, the farm dogs accompanied their passage with tragic ululations; and it grew and grew upon his mind that some unnatural miracle had been accomplished, that some nameless change had befallen the dead body, and that it was in fear of their unholy burden that the dogs were howling.

'For God's sake,' said he, making a great effort to arrive at speech, 'for God's sake, let's have a light!'

Seemingly Macfarlane was affected in the same direction; for, though he made no reply, he stopped the horse, passed the reins to his companion, got down, and proceeded to kindle the remaining lamp. They had by that time got no farther than the cross-road down to Auchenclinny. The rain still poured as though the deluge were returning, and it was no easy matter to make a light in such a world of wet and darkness. When at last the flickering blue flame had been transferred to the wick and began to expand and clarify, and shed a wide circle of misty brightness round the gig, it became possible for the two young men to see each other and the thing they had along with them. The rain had moulded the rough sacking to the outlines of the body underneath; the head was distinct from the trunk, the shoulders plainly modelled; something at once spectral and human riveted their eyes upon the ghastly comrade of their drive.

For some time Macfarlane stood motionless, holding up the lamp. A nameless dread was swathed, like a wet sheet, about the body, and tightened the white skin upon the face of Fettes; a fear that was meaningless, a horror

of what could not be, kept mounting to his brain. Another beat of the watch, and he had spoken. But his comrade forestalled him.

‘That is not a woman,’ said Macfarlane, in a hushed voice.

‘It was a woman when we put her in,’ whispered Fettes.

‘Hold that lamp,’ said the other. ‘I must see her face.’

And as Fettes took the lamp his companion untied the fastenings of the sack and drew down the cover from the head. The light fell very clear upon the dark, well-moulded features and smooth-shaven cheeks of a too familiar countenance, often beheld in dreams of both of these young men. A wild yell rang up into the night; each leaped from his own side into the roadway; the lamp fell, broke, and was extinguished; and the horse, terrified by this unusual commotion, bounded and went off toward Edinburgh at a gallop, bearing along with it, sole occupant of the gig, the body of the dead and long-dissected Gray.

Markheim

‘Yes,’ said the dealer, ‘our windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend on my superior knowledge. Some are dishonest,’ and here he held up the candle, so that the light fell strongly on his visitor, ‘and in that case,’ he continued, ‘I profit by my virtue.’

Markheim had but just entered from the daylight streets, and his eyes had not yet grown familiar with the mingled shine and darkness in the shop. At these pointed words, and before the near presence of the flame, he blinked painfully and looked aside.

The dealer chuckled. ‘You come to me on Christmas Day,’ he resumed, ‘when you know that I am alone in my house, put up my shutters, and make a point of refusing business. Well, you will have to pay for that; you will have to pay for my loss of time, when I should be balancing my books; you will have to pay, besides, for a kind of manner that I remark in you today very strongly. I am the essence of discretion, and ask no awkward questions; but when a customer cannot look me in the eye, he has to pay for it.’ The dealer once more chuckled; and then, changing to his usual business voice, though still with a note of irony, ‘You can give, as usual, a clear account of how you came into the possession of the object?’ he continued. ‘Still your uncle’s cabinet? A remarkable collector, sir!’

And the little pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tiptoe, looking over the top of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head with every mark of disbelief. Markheim returned his gaze with one of infinite pity, and a touch of horror.

‘This time,’ said he, ‘you are in error. I have not come to sell, but to buy. I have no curios to dispose of; my uncle’s cabinet is bare to the wainscot; even were it still intact, I have done well on the Stock Exchange, and should more likely add to it than otherwise, and my errand today is simplicity itself. I seek a Christmas present for a lady,’ he continued,

waxing more fluent as he struck into the speech he had prepared; ‘and certainly I owe you every excuse for thus disturbing you upon so small a matter. But the thing was neglected yesterday; I must produce my little compliment at dinner; and, as you very well know, a rich marriage is not a thing to be neglected.’

There followed a pause, during which the dealer seemed to weigh this statement incredulously. The ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber of the shop, and the faint rushing of the cabs in a near thoroughfare, filled up the interval of silence. ‘Well, sir,’ said the dealer, ‘be it so. You are an old customer after all; and if, as you say, you have the chance of a good marriage, far be it from me to be an obstacle. Here is a nice thing for a lady now,’ he went on, ‘this hand-glass – fifteenth century, warranted; comes from a good collection, too; but I reserve the name, in the interests of my customer, who was just like yourself, my dear sir, the nephew and sole heir of a remarkable collector.’

The dealer, while he thus ran on in his dry and biting voice, had stooped to take the object from its place; and, as he had done so, a shock had passed through Markheim, a start both of hand and foot, a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face. It passed as swiftly as it came, and left no trace beyond a certain trembling of the hand that now received the glass.

‘A glass,’ he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. ‘A glass? For Christmas? Surely not?’

‘And why not?’ cried the dealer. ‘Why not a glass?’

Markheim was looking upon him with an indefinable expression. ‘You ask me why not?’ he said. ‘Why, look here – look in it – look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I – nor any man.’

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. ‘Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard-favoured,’ said he.

‘I ask you,’ said Markheim, ‘for a Christmas present, and you give me this – this damned reminder of years, and sins and follies – this hand-conscience! Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind? Tell me. It will be better for you if you do. Come, tell me about yourself. I hazard a guess now, that you are in secret a very charitable man?’

The dealer looked closely at his companion. It was very odd, Markheim did not appear to be laughing; there was something in his face like an eager sparkle of hope, but nothing of mirth.

'What are you driving at?' the dealer asked.

'Not charitable?' returned the other gloomily. 'Not charitable; not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. Is that all? Dear God, man, is that all?'

'I will tell you what it is,' began the dealer, with some sharpness, and then broke off again into a chuckle. 'But I see this is a love match of yours, and you have been drinking the lady's health.'

'Ah!' cried Markheim, with a strange curiosity. 'Ah, have you been in love? Tell me about that.'

'I,' cried the dealer. 'I in love! I never had the time, nor have I the time today for all this nonsense. Will you take the glass?'

'Where is the hurry?' returned Markheim. 'It is very pleasant to stand here talking; and life is so short and insecure that I would not hurry away from any pleasure – no, not even from so mild a one as this. We should rather cling, cling to what little we can get, like a man at a cliff's edge. Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it – a cliff a mile high – high enough, if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity. Hence it is best to talk pleasantly. Let us talk of each other: why should we wear this mask? Let us be confidential. Who knows, we might become friends?'

'I have just one word to say to you,' said the dealer. 'Either make your purchase, or walk out of my shop!'

'True, true,' said Markheim. 'Enough fooling. To business. Show me something else.'

The dealer stooped once more, this time to replace the glass upon the shelf, his thin blond hair falling over his eyes as he did so. Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his greatcoat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; at the same time many different emotions were depicted together on his face – terror, horror, and resolve, fascination and a physical repulsion; and through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.

'This, perhaps, may suit,' observed the dealer: and then, as he began to re-arise, Markheim bounded from behind upon his victim. The long,

skewer-like dagger flashed and fell. The dealer struggled like a hen, striking his temple on the shelf, and then tumbled on the floor in a heap.

Time had some score of small voices in that shop, some stately and slow, as was becoming to their great age; others garrulous and hurried. All these told out the seconds in an intricate chorus of tickings. Then the passage of a lad's feet, heavily running on the pavement, broke in upon these smaller voices and startled Markheim into the consciousness of his surroundings. He looked about him awfully. The candle stood on the counter, its flame solemnly wagging in a draught; and by that inconsiderable movement, the whole room was filled with noiseless bustle and kept heaving like a sea: the tall shadows nodding, the gross blots of darkness swelling and dwindling as with respiration, the faces of the portraits and the china gods changing and wavering like images in water. The inner door stood ajar, and peered into that leaguer of shadows with a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger.

From these fear-stricken rovings, Markheim's eyes returned to the body of his victim, where it lay both humped and sprawling, incredibly small and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserly clothes, in that ungainly attitude, the dealer lay like so much sawdust. Markheim had feared to see it, and, lo! it was nothing. And yet, as he gazed, this bundle of old clothes and pool of blood began to find eloquent voices. There it must lie; there was none to work the cunning hinges or direct the miracle of locomotion – there it must lie till it was found. Found! ay, and then? Then would this dead flesh lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with the echoes of pursuit. Ay, dead or not, this was still the enemy. 'Time was that when the brains were out,' he thought; and the first word struck into his mind. Time, now that the deed was accomplished – time, which had closed for the victim, had become instant and momentous for the slayer.

The thought was yet in his mind, when, first one and then another, with every variety of pace and voice – one deep as the bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz – the clocks began to strike the hour of three in the afternoon.

The sudden outbreak of so many tongues in that dumb chamber staggered him. He began to bestir himself, going to and fro with the candle, beleaguered by moving shadows, and startled to the soul by chance reflections. In many rich mirrors, some of home design, some from Venice or Amsterdam, he saw his face repeated and repeated, as it were an army of

spies; his own eyes met and detected him; and the sound of his own steps, lightly as they fell, vexed the surrounding quiet. And still, as he continued to fill his pockets, his mind accused him, with a sickening iteration, of the thousand faults of his design. He should have chosen a more quiet hour; he should have prepared an alibi; he should not have used a knife; he should have been more cautious, and only bound and gagged the dealer, and not killed him; he should have been more bold, and killed the servant also; he should have done all things otherwise: poignant regrets, weary, incessant toiling of the mind to change what was unchangeable, to plan what was now useless, to be the architect of the irrevocable past. Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot; the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish; or he beheld, in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin.

Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army. It was impossible, he thought, but that some rumour of the struggle must have reached their ears and set on edge their curiosity; and now, in all the neighbouring houses, he divined them sitting motionless and with uplifted ear – solitary people, condemned to spend Christmas dwelling alone on memories of the past, and now startingly recalled from that tender exercise; happy family parties, struck into silence round the table, the mother still with raised finger: every degree and age and humour, but all, by their own hearths, prying and hearkening and weaving the rope that was to hang him. Sometimes it seemed to him he could not move too softly; the clink of the tall Bohemian goblets rang out loudly like a bell; and alarmed by the bigness of the ticking, he was tempted to stop the clocks. And then, again, with a swift transition of his terrors, the very silence of the place appeared a source of peril, and a thing to strike and freeze the passer-by; and he would step more boldly, and bustle aloud among the contents of the shop, and imitate, with elaborate bravado, the movements of a busy man at ease in his own house.

But he was now so pulled about by different alarms that, while one portion of his mind was still alert and cunning, another trembled on the brink of lunacy. One hallucination in particular took a strong hold on his credulity. The neighbour hearkening with white face beside his window, the

passer-by arrested by a horrible surmise on the pavement – these could at worst suspect, they could not know; through the brick walls and shuttered windows only sounds could penetrate. But here, within the house, was he alone? He knew he was; he had watched the servant set forth sweethearting, in her poor best, ‘out for the day’ written in every ribbon and smile. Yes, he was alone, of course; and yet, in the bulk of empty house above him, he could surely hear a stir of delicate footing – he was surely conscious, inexplicably conscious of some presence. Ay, surely; to every room and corner of the house his imagination followed it; and now it was a faceless thing, and yet had eyes to see with; and again it was a shadow of himself; and yet again beheld the image of the dead dealer, reinspired with cunning and hatred.

At times, with a strong effort, he would glance at the open door which still seemed to repel his eyes. The house was tall, the skylight small and dirty, the day blind with fog; and the light that filtered down to the ground storey was exceedingly faint, and showed dimly on the threshold of the shop. And yet, in that strip of doubtful brightness, did there not hang wavering a shadow?

Suddenly, from the street outside, a very jovial gentleman began to beat with a staff on the shop door, accompanying his blows with shouts and railleries in which the dealer was continually called upon by name. Markheim, smitten into ice, glanced at the dead man. But no! he lay quite still; he was fled away far beyond earshot of these blows and shoutings; he was sunk beneath seas of silence; and his name, which would once have caught his notice above the howling of a storm, had become an empty sound. And presently the jovial gentleman desisted from his knocking and departed.

Here was a broad hint to hurry what remained to be done, to get forth from this accusing neighbourhood, to plunge into a bath of London multitudes, and to reach, on the other side of day, that haven of safety and apparent innocence – his bed. One visitor had come: at any moment another might follow and be more obstinate. To have done the deed, and yet not to reap the profit, would be too abhorrent a failure. The money, that was now Markheim’s concern; and as a means to that, the keys.

He glanced over his shoulder at the open door, where the shadow was still lingering and shivering; and with no conscious repugnance of the mind,

yet with a tremor of the belly, he drew near the body of his victim. The human character had quite departed. Like a suit half-stuffed with bran, the limbs lay scattered, the trunk doubled, on the floor; and yet the thing repelled him. Although so dingy and inconsiderable to the eye, he feared it might have more significance to the touch. He took the body by the shoulders, and turned it on its back. It was strangely light and supple, and the limbs, as if they had been broken, fell into the oddest postures. The face was robbed of all expression: but it was as pale as wax, and shockingly smeared with blood about one temple. That was, for Markheim, the one displeasing circumstance. It carried him back, upon the instant, to a certain fair-day in a fishers' village: a grey day, a piping wind, a crowd upon the street, the blare of brasses, the booming of drums, the nasal voice of a ballad-singer; and a boy going to and fro, buried overhead in the crowd and divided between interest and fear, until, coming out upon the chief place of concourse, he beheld a booth and a great screen with pictures, dismally designed, garishly coloured: Brownrigg with her apprentice; the Mannings with their murdered guest; Weare in death-grip of Thurtell; and a score besides of famous crimes. The thing was as clear as an illusion; he was once again that little boy; he was looking once again, and with the same sense of physical revolt, at these vile pictures; he was still stunned by the thumping of the drums. A bar of that day's music returned upon his memory; and at that, for the first time, a qualm came over him, a breath of nausea, a sudden weakness of the joints, which he must instantly resist and conquer.

He judged it more prudent to confront than to flee from these considerations; looking the more hardily in the dead face, bending his mind to realise the nature and greatness of his crime. So little a while ago that face had moved with every change of sentiment, that pale mouth had spoken, that body had been all on fire with governable energies; and now, and by his act, that piece of life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. So he reasoned in vain; he could rise to no more remorseful consciousness; the same heart which had shuddered before the painted effigies of crime, looked on its reality unmoved. At best, he felt a gleam of pity for one who had been endowed in vain with all those faculties that can make the world a garden of enchantment, one who had never lived and who was now dead. But of penitence, no, not a tremor.

With that, shaking himself clear of these considerations, he found the keys and advanced towards the open door of the shop. Outside, it had begun to rain smartly; and the sound of the shower upon the roof had banished silence. Like some dripping cavern, the chambers of the house were haunted by an incessant echoing, which filled the ear and mingled with the ticking of the clocks. And, as Markheim approached the door, he seemed to hear, in answer to his own cautious tread, the steps of another foot withdrawing up the stair. The shadow still palpitated loosely on the threshold. He threw a ton's weight of resolve upon his muscles, and drew back the door.

The faint, foggy daylight glimmered dimly on the bare floor and stairs; on the bright suit of armour posted, halbert in hand, upon the landing; and on the dark wood-carvings, and framed pictures that hung against the yellow panels of the wainscot. So loud was the beating of the rain through all the house that, in Markheim's ears, it began to be distinguished into many different sounds. Footsteps and sighs, the tread of regiments marching in the distance, the chink of money in the counting, and the creaking of doors held stealthily ajar, appeared to mingle with the patter of the drops upon the cupola and the gushing of the water in the pipes. The sense that he was not alone grew upon him to the verge of madness. On every side he was haunted and begirt by presences. He heard them moving in the upper chambers; from the shop, he heard the dead man getting to his legs; and as he began with a great effort to mount the stairs, feet fled quietly before him and followed stealthily behind. If he were but deaf, he thought, how tranquilly he would possess his soul! And then again, and hearkening with ever fresh attention, he blessed himself for that unresting sense which held the outposts and stood a trusty sentinel upon his life. His head turned continually on his neck; his eyes, which seemed starting from their orbits, scouted on every side, and on every side were half-rewarded as with the tail of something nameless vanishing. The four-and-twenty steps to the first floor were four-and-twenty agonies.

On that first storey, the doors stood ajar, three of them like three ambushes, shaking his nerves like the throats of cannon. He could never again, he felt, be sufficiently immured and fortified from men's observing eyes; he longed to be home, girt in by walls, buried among bedclothes, and invisible to all but God. And at that thought he wondered a little,

recollecting tales of other murderers and the fear they were said to entertain of heavenly avengers. It was not so, at least, with him. He feared the laws of nature, lest, in their callous and immutable procedure, they should preserve some damning evidence of his crime. He feared tenfold more, with a slavish, superstitious terror, some scission in the continuity of man's experience, some wilful illegality of nature. He played a game of skill, depending on the rules, calculating consequence from cause; and what if nature, as the defeated tyrant overthrew the chess-board, should break the mould of their succession? The like had befallen Napoleon (so writers said) when the winter changed the time of its appearance. The like might befall Markheim: the solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his foot like quicksands and detain him in their clutch; ay, and there were soberer accidents that might destroy him: if, for instance, the house should fall and imprison him beside the body of his victim; or the house next door should fly on fire, and the firemen invade him from all sides. These things he feared; and, in a sense, these things might be called the hands of God reached forth against sin. But about God Himself he was at ease; his act was doubtless exceptional, but so were his excuses, which God knew; it was there, and not among men, that he felt sure of justice.

When he had got safe into the drawing-room, and shut the door behind him, he was aware of a respite from alarms. The room was quite dismantled, uncarpeted besides, and strewn with packing-cases and incongruous furniture; several great pier-glasses, in which he beheld himself at various angles, like an actor on a stage; many pictures, framed and unframed, standing, with their faces to the wall; a fine Sheraton sideboard, a cabinet of marquetry, and a great old bed, with tapestry hangings. The windows opened to the floor; but by great good fortune the lower part of the shutters had been closed, and this concealed him from the neighbours. Here, then, Markheim drew in a packing-case before the cabinet, and began to search among the keys. It was a long business, for there were many; and it was irksome, besides; for, after all, there might be nothing in the cabinet, and time was on the wing. But the closeness of the occupation sobered him. With the tail of his eye he saw the door – even glanced at it from time to time directly, like a besieged commander pleased to verify the good estate of his defences. But in truth he was at peace. The

rain falling in the street sounded natural and pleasant. Presently, on the other side, the notes of a piano were wakened to the music of a hymn, and the voices of many children took up the air and words. How stately, how comfortable was the melody! How fresh the youthful voices! Markheim gave ear to it smilingly, as he sorted out the keys; and his mind was thronged with answerable ideas and images; church-going children and the pealing of the high organ; children afield, bathers by the brookside, ramblers on the brambly common, kite-flyers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky; and then, at another cadence of the hymn, back again to church, and the somnolence of summer Sundays, and the high genteel voice of the parson (which he smiled a little to recall) and the painted Jacobean tombs, and the dim lettering of the Ten Commandments in the chancel.

And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily, and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock clicked, and the door opened.

Fear held Markheim in a vice. What to expect he knew not, whether the dead man walking, or the official ministers of human justice, or some chance witness blindly stumbling in to consign him to the gallows. But when a face was thrust into the aperture, glanced round the room, looked at him, nodded and smiled as if in friendly recognition, and then withdrew again, and the door closed behind it, his fear broke loose from his control in a hoarse cry. At the sound of this the visitant returned.

‘Did you call me?’ he asked pleasantly, and with that he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Markheim stood and gazed at him with all his eyes. Perhaps there was a film upon his sight, but the outlines of the newcomer seemed to change and waver like those of the idols in the wavering candle-light of the shop; and at times he thought he knew him; and at times he thought he bore a likeness to himself; and always, like a lump of living terror, there lay in his bosom the conviction that this thing was not of the earth and not of God.

And yet the creature had a strange air of the commonplace, as he stood looking on Markheim with a smile; and when he added: ‘You are looking for the money, I believe?’ it was in the tones of everyday politeness.

Markheim made no answer.

‘I should warn you,’ resumed the other, ‘that the maid has left her sweetheart earlier than usual and will soon be here. If Mr Markheim be found in this house, I need not describe to him the consequences.’

‘You know me?’ cried the murderer.

The visitor smiled. ‘You have long been a favourite of mine,’ he said; ‘and I have long observed and often sought to help you.’

‘What are you?’ cried Markheim: ‘the devil?’

‘What I may be,’ returned the other, ‘cannot affect the service I propose to render you.’

‘It can,’ cried Markheim; ‘it does! Be helped by you? No, never; not by you! You do not know me yet; thank God, you do not know me!’

‘I know you,’ replied the visitant, with a sort of kind severity or rather firmness. ‘I know you to the soul.’

‘Know me!’ cried Markheim. ‘Who can do so? My life is but a travesty and slander on myself. I have lived to belie my nature. All men do; all men are better than this disguise that grows about and stifles them. You see each dragged away by life, like one whom bravos have seized and muffled in a cloak. If they had their own control – if you could see their faces, they would be altogether different, they would shine out for heroes and saints! I am worse than most; myself is more overlaid; my excuse is known to me and God. But, had I the time, I could disclose myself.’

‘To me?’ inquired the visitant.

‘To you before all,’ returned the murderer. ‘I supposed you were intelligent. I thought – since you exist – you would prove a reader of the heart. And yet you would propose to judge me by my acts! Think of it; my acts! I was born and I have lived in a land of giants; giants have dragged me by the wrists since I was born out of my mother – the giants of circumstance. And you would judge me by my acts! But can you not look within? Can you not understand that evil is hateful to me? Can you not see within me the clear writing of conscience, never blurred by any wilful sophistry, although too often disregarded? Can you not read me for a thing that surely must be common as humanity – the unwilling sinner?’

‘All this is very feelingly expressed,’ was the reply, ‘but it regards me not. These points of consistency are beyond my province, and I care not in the least by what compulsion you may have been dragged away, so as you are but carried in the right direction. But time flies; the servant delays,

looking in the faces of the crowd and at the pictures on the hoardings, but still she keeps moving nearer; and remember, it is as if the gallows itself was striding towards you through the Christmas streets! Shall I help you; I, who know all? Shall I tell you where to find the money?'

'For what price?' asked Markheim.

'I offer you the service for a Christmas gift,' returned the other.

Markheim could not refrain from smiling with a kind of bitter triumph. 'No,' said he, 'I will take nothing at your hands; if I were dying of thirst, and it was your hand that put the pitcher to my lips, I should find the courage to refuse. It may be credulous, but I will do nothing to commit myself to evil.'

'I have no objection to a death-bed repentance,' observed the visitant.

'Because you disbelieve their efficacy!' Markheim cried.

'I do not say so,' returned the other; 'but I look on these things from a different side, and when the life is done my interest falls. The man has lived to serve me, to spread black looks under colour of religion, or to sow tares in the wheat-field, as you do, in a course of weak compliance with desire. Now that he draws so near to his deliverance, he can add but one act of service – to repent, to die smiling, and thus to build up in confidence and hope the more timorous of my surviving followers. I am not so hard a master. Try me. Accept my help. Please yourself in life as you have done hitherto; please yourself more amply, spread your elbows at the board; and when the night begins to fall and the curtains to be drawn, I tell you, for your greater comfort, that you will find it even easy to compound your quarrel with your conscience, and to make a truckling peace with God. I came but now from such a death-bed, and the room was full of sincere mourners, listening to the man's last words: and when I looked into that face, which had been set as a flint against mercy, I found it smiling with hope.'

'And do you, then, suppose me such a creature?' asked Markheim. 'Do you think I have no more generous aspirations than to sin, and sin, and sin, and, at the last, sneak into heaven? My heart rises at the thought. Is this, then, your experience of mankind? or is it because you find me with red hands that you presume such baseness? and is this crime of murder indeed so impious as to dry up the very springs of good?'

‘Murder is to me no special category,’ replied the other. ‘All sins are murder, even as all life is war. I behold your race, like starving mariners on a raft, plucking crusts out of the hands of famine and feeding on each other’s lives. I follow sins beyond the moment of their acting; I find in all that the last consequence is death; and to my eyes, the pretty maid who thwarts her mother with such taking graces on a question of a ball, drips no less visibly with human gore than such a murderer as yourself. Do I say that I follow sins? I follow virtues also; they differ not by the thickness of a nail, they are both scythes for the reaping angel of Death. Evil, for which I live, consists not in action but in character. The bad man is dear to me; not the bad act, whose fruits, if we could follow them far enough down the hurtling cataract of the ages, might yet be found more blessed than those of the rarest virtues. And it is not because you have killed a dealer, but because you are Markheim, that I offer to forward your escape.’

‘I will lay my heart open to you,’ answered Markheim. ‘This crime on which you find me is my last. On my way to it I have learned many lessons; itself is a lesson, a momentous lesson. Hitherto I have been driven with revolt to what I would not; I was a bond-slave to poverty, driven and scourged. There are robust virtues that can stand in these temptations; mine was not so: I had a thirst of pleasure. But today, and out of this deed, I pluck both warning and riches – both the power and a fresh resolve to be myself. I become in all things a free actor in the world; I begin to see myself all changed, these hands the agents of good, this heart at peace. Something comes over me out of the past; something of what I have dreamed on Sabbath evenings to the sound of the church organ, of what I forecast when I shed tears over noble books, or talked, an innocent child, with my mother. There lies my life; I have wandered a few years, but now I see once more my city of destination.’

‘You are to use this money on the Stock Exchange, I think?’ remarked the visitor; ‘and there, if I mistake not, you have already lost some thousands?’

‘Ah,’ said Markheim, ‘but this time I have a sure thing.’

‘This time, again, you will lose,’ replied the visitor quietly.

‘Ah, but I keep back the half!’ cried Markheim.

‘That also you will lose,’ said the other.

The sweat started upon Markheim’s brow. ‘Well, then, what matter?’ he exclaimed. ‘Say it be lost, say I am plunged again in poverty, shall one part

of me, and that the worse, continue until the end to override the better? Evil and good run strong in me, haling me both ways. I do not love the one thing, I love all. I can conceive great deeds, renunciations, martyrdoms; and though I be fallen to such a crime as murder, pity is no stranger to my thoughts. I pity the poor; who knows their trials better than myself? I pity and help them; I prize love, I love honest laughter; there is no good thing nor true thing on earth but I love it from my heart. And are my vices only to direct my life, and my virtues to lie without effect, like some passive lumber of the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts.'

But the visitant raised his finger. 'For six-and-thirty years that you have been in this world,' said he, 'through many changes of fortune and varieties of humour, I have watched you steadily fall. Fifteen years ago you would have started at a theft. Three years back you would have blenched at the name of murder. Is there any crime, is there any cruelty or meanness, from which you still recoil? – five years from now I shall detect you in the fact! Downward, downward, lies your way; nor can anything but death avail to stop you.'

'It is true,' Markheim said huskily, 'I have in some degree complied with evil. But it is so with all: the very saints, in the mere exercise of living, grow less dainty, and take on the tone of their surroundings.'

'I will propound to you one simple question,' said the other; 'and as you answer, I shall read to you your moral horoscope. You have grown in many things more lax; possibly you do right to be so; and at any account, it is the same with all men. But granting that, are you in any one particular, however trifling, more difficult to please with your own conduct, or do you go in all things with a looser rein?'

'In any one?' repeated Markheim, with an anguish of consideration. 'No,' he added, with despair, 'in none! I have gone down in all.'

'Then,' said the visitor, 'content yourself with what you are, for you will never change; and the words of your part on this stage are irrevocably written down.'

Markheim stood for a long while silent, and indeed it was the visitor who first broke the silence. 'That being so,' he said, 'shall I show you the money?'

'And grace?' cried Markheim.

‘Have you not tried it?’ returned the other. ‘Two or three years ago, did I not see you on the platform of revival meetings, and was not your voice the loudest in the hymn?’

‘It is true,’ said Markheim; ‘and I see clearly what remains for me by way of duty. I thank you for these lessons from my soul; my eyes are opened, and I behold myself at least for what I am.’

At this moment, the sharp note of the door-bell rang through the house; and the visitant, as though this were some concerted signal for which he had been waiting, changed at once in his demeanour.

‘The maid!’ he cried. ‘She has returned, as I forewarned you, and there is now before you one more difficult passage. Her master, you must say, is ill; you must let here in, with an assured but rather serious countenance – no smiles, no overacting, and I promise you success! Once the girl within, and the door closed, the same dexterity that has already rid you of the dealer will relieve you of this last danger in your path. Thenceforward you have the whole evening – the whole night, if needful – to ransack the treasures of the house and to make good your safety. This is help that comes to you with the mask of danger. Up!’ he cried; ‘up, friend; your life hangs trembling in the scales: up, and act!’

Markheim steadily regarded his counsellor. ‘If I be condemned to evil acts,’ he said, ‘there is still one door of freedom open – I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet, by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all. My love of good is damned to barrenness; it may, and let it be! But I have still my hatred of evil; and from that, to your galling disappointment, you shall see that I can draw both energy and courage.’

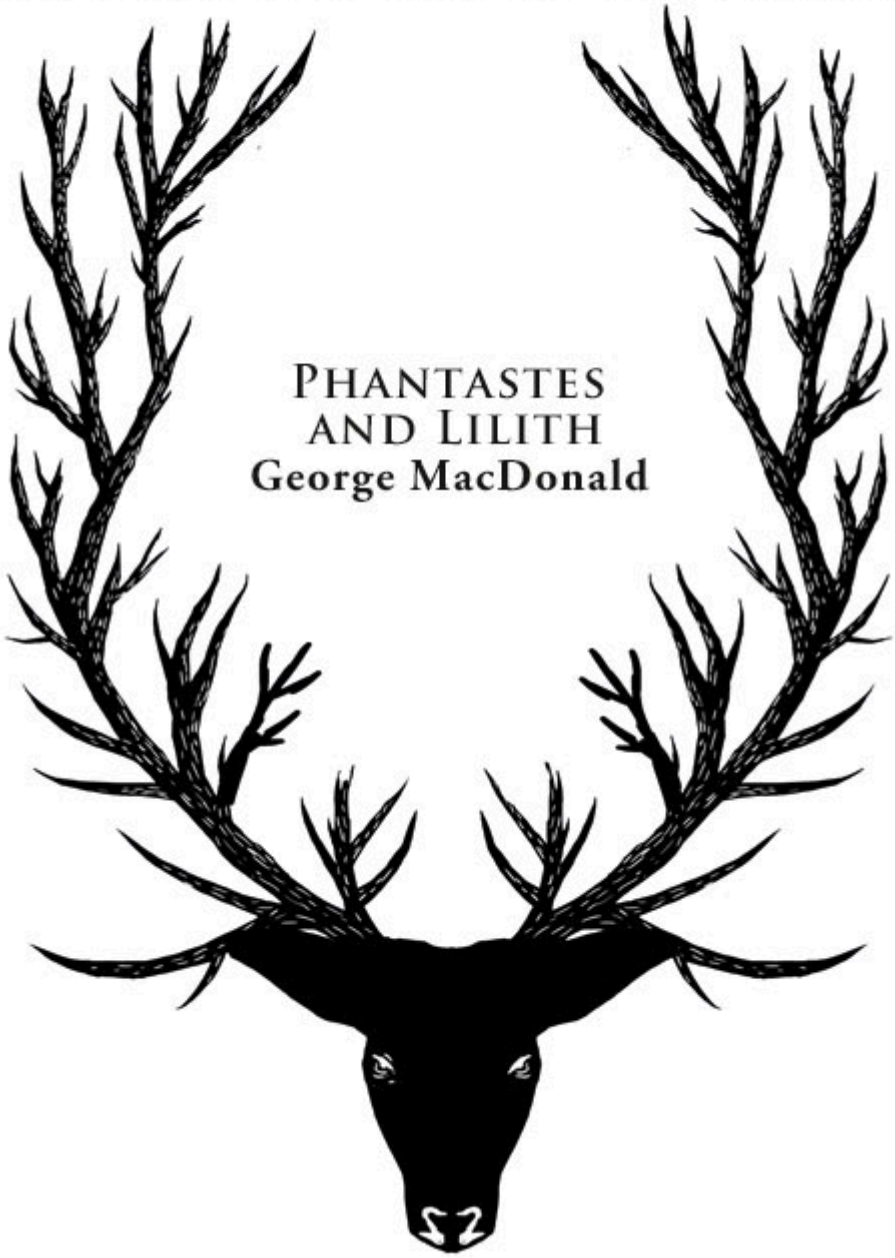
The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change: they brightened and softened with a tender triumph, and, even as they brightened, faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation. He opened the door and went downstairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chancemedley – a scene of defeat. Life, as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but on the farther side he perceived a quiet haven for his bark. He paused in the passage, and looked into the shop, where the candle still

burned by the dead body. It was strangely silent. Thoughts of the dealer swarmed into his mind, as he stood gazing. And then the bell once more broke out into impatient clamour.

He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

‘You had better go for the police,’ said he: ‘I have killed your master.’

SCOTTISH
SUPERNATURAL CLASSICS



PHANTASTES AND LILITH

George MacDonald

‘More convinced than before, that there was evil here, I could not endure that my master should be deceived; that one like him, so pure and noble, should respect what, if my suspicions were true, was worse than the ordinary deceptions of priestcraft.’

About the Author

George MacDonald (1824–1905) was born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, but left to study at Aberdeen University, and later in London for the congregational ministry. He was involved in ministerial work in various places including Manchester and Algiers, but eventually settled in London where he taught at the University of London for a time. MacDonald's first work was published in 1855, which was a book-length poem, and the publication of *Phantastes* in 1858 firmly established his status as a writer. Between 1855 and his death in 1905, MacDonald published over 100 books in a variety of genres including fantasy, romance and a number of Christian sermons – authors such as C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and E. Nesbit are said to have been influenced by his work.

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Phantastes

CHAPTER 1

A spirit * *
* * * *
The undulating woods, and silent well,
And rippling rivulet, and evening gloom,
Now deepening the dark shades, for speech assuming,
Held commune with him; as if he and it
Were all that was.

SHELLEY'S *Alastor*

I awoke one morning with the usual perplexity of mind which accompanies the return of consciousness. As I lay and looked through the eastern window of my room, a faint streak of peach-colour, dividing a cloud that just rose above the low swell of the horizon, announced the approach of the sun. As my thoughts, which a deep and apparently dreamless sleep had dissolved, began again to assume crystalline forms, the strange events of the foregoing night presented themselves anew to my wondering consciousness. The day before had been my one-and-twentieth birthday. Among other ceremonies investing me with my legal rights, the keys of an old secretary, in which my father had kept his private papers, had been delivered up to me. As soon as I was left alone, I ordered lights in the chamber where the secretary stood, the first lights that had been there for many a year; for, since my father's death, the room had been left undisturbed. But, as if the darkness had been too long an inmate to be easily expelled, and had dyed with blackness the walls to which, bat-like, it had clung, these tapers served but ill to light up the gloomy hangings, and seemed to throw yet darker shadows into the hollows of the deep-wrought cornice. All the further portions of the room lay shrouded in a mystery whose deepest folds were gathered around the dark oak cabinet which I now approached with a strange mingling of reverence and curiosity. Perhaps, like a geologist, I was about to turn up to the light some of the buried strata of the human world, with its fossil remains

charred by passion and petrified by tears. Perhaps I was to learn how my father, whose personal history was unknown to me, had woven his web of story; how he had found the world, and how the world had left him. Perhaps I was to find only the records of lands and moneys, how gotten and how secured; coming down from strange men, and through troublous times, to me who knew little or nothing of them all.

To solve my speculations, and to dispel the awe which was fast gathering around me as if the dead were drawing near, I approached the secretary; and having found the key that fitted the upper portion, I opened it with some difficulty, drew near it a heavy high-backed chair, and sat down before a multitude of little drawers and slides and pigeon-holes. But the door of a little cupboard in the centre especially attracted my interest, as if there lay the secret of this long hidden world. Its key I found. One of the rusty hinges cracked and broke as I opened the door: it revealed a number of small pigeon-holes. These, however, being but shallow compared with the depth of those around the little cupboard, the outer ones reaching to the back of the desk, I concluded that there must be some accessible space behind; and found, indeed, that they were formed in a separate framework, which admitted of the whole being pulled out in one piece. Behind, I found a sort of flexible portcullis of small bars of wood laid close together horizontally. After long search, and trying many ways to move it, I discovered at last a scarcely projecting point of steel on one side. I pressed this repeatedly and hard with the point of an old tool that was lying near, till at length it yielded inwards; and the little slide, flying up suddenly, disclosed a chamber – empty, except that in one corner lay a little heap of withered rose-leaves, whose long-lived scent had long since departed; and, in another, a small packet of papers, tied with a bit of ribbon, whose colour had gone with the rose-scent. Almost fearing to touch them, they witnessed so mutely to the law of oblivion, I leaned back in my chair, and regarded them for a moment; when suddenly there stood on the threshold of the little chamber, as though she had just emerged from its depth, a tiny woman-form, as perfect in shape as if she had been a small Greek statuette roused to life and motion. Her dress was of a kind that could never grow old-fashioned, because it was simply natural: a robe plaited in a band around the neck, and confined by a belt about the waist, descended to her feet. It was only afterwards, however, that I took notice of her dress, although my surprise

was by no means of so overpowering a degree as such an apparition might naturally be expected to excite. Seeing, however, as I suppose, some astonishment in my countenance, she came forward within a yard of me, and said, in a voice that strangely recalled a sensation of twilight, and reedy river banks, and a low wind, even in this deathly room,

'Anodos, you never saw such a little creature before, did you?'

'No,' said I; 'and indeed I hardly believe I do now.'

'Ah! that is always the way with you men; you believe nothing the first time; and it is foolish enough to let mere repetition convince you of what you consider in itself unbelievable. I am not going to argue with you, however, but to grant you a wish.'

Here I could not help interrupting her with the foolish speech, of which, however, I had no cause to repent:

'How can such a very little creature as you grant or refuse anything?'

'Is that all the philosophy you have gained in one-and-twenty years?' said she. 'Form is much, but size is nothing. It is a mere matter of relation. I suppose your six-foot lordship does not feel altogether insignificant, though to others you do look small beside your old Uncle Ralph, who rises above you a great half-foot at least. But size is of so little consequence with me, that I may as well accommodate myself to your foolish prejudices.'

So saying, she leapt from the desk upon the floor; where she stood a tall, gracious lady, with pale face and large blue eyes. Her dark hair flowed behind, wavy but uncurled, down to her waist, and against it her form stood clear in its robe of white.

'Now,' said she, 'you will believe me.'

Overcome with the presence of a beauty which I could now perceive, and drawn towards her by an attraction irresistible as incomprehensible, I suppose I stretched out my arms towards her, for she drew back a step or two, and said:

'Foolish boy, if you could touch me, I should hurt you. Besides, I was two hundred and thirty-seven years old, last Midsummer eve; and a man must not fall in love with his grandmother, you know.'

'But you are not my grandmother,' said I.

'How do you know that?' she retorted. 'I dare say you know something of your great grandfathers a good deal further back than that; but you know

very little about your great grandmothers on either side. Now, to the point. Your little sister was reading a fairytale to you last night.'

'She was.'

'When she had finished, she said, as she closed the book, "Is there a fairy-country, brother?" You replied with a sigh, "I suppose there is, if one could find the way into it."'

'I did; but I meant something quite different from what you seem to think.'

'Never mind what I seem to think. You shall find the way into Fairy Land tomorrow. Now look in my eyes.'

Eagerly I did so. They filled me with an unknown longing. I remembered somehow that my mother died when I was a baby. I looked deeper and deeper, till they spread around me like seas, and I sank in their waters. I forgot all the rest, till I found myself at the window, whose gloomy curtains were withdrawn, and where I stood gazing on a whole heaven of stars, small and sparkling in the moonlight. Below lay a sea, still as death and hoary in the moon, sweeping into bays and around capes and islands, away, away, I knew not whither. Alas! it was no sea, but a low fog burnished by the moon. 'Surely there is such a sea somewhere!' said I to myself. A low sweet voice beside me replied –

'In Fairy Land, Anodos.'

I turned, but saw no one. I closed the secretary, and went to my own room, and to bed.

All this I recalled as I lay with half-closed eyes. I was soon to find the truth of the lady's promise, that this day I should discover the road into Fairy-Land.

CHAPTER 2

‘Wo ist der Strom?’ rief er mit Thränen. ‘Siehst du nicht seine blauen Wellen über uns?’ Er sah hinauf, und der blaue Strom floss leise über ihrem Haupte. –

NOVALIS *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

‘Where is the stream?’ cried he, with tears. ‘Seest thou not its blue waves above us?’ He looked up, and lo! the blue stream was flowing gently over their heads.

While these strange events were passing through my mind, I suddenly, as one awakes to the consciousness that the sea has been moaning by him for hours, or that the storm has been howling about his window all night, became aware of the sound of running water near me; and looking out of bed, I saw that a large green marble basin, in which I was wont to wash, and which stood on a low pedestal of the same material in a corner of my room, was overflowing like a spring; and that a stream of clear water was running over the carpet, all the length of the room, finding its outlet I knew not where. And, stranger still, where this carpet, which I had myself designed to imitate a field of grass and daisies, bordered the course of the little stream, the grass-blades and daisies seemed to wave in a tiny breeze that followed the water’s flow; while under the rivulet they bent and swayed with every motion of the changeful current, as if they were about to dissolve with it, and, forsaking their fixed form, become fluent as the waters.

My dressing-table was an old-fashioned piece of furniture of black oak, with drawers all down the front. These were elaborately carved in foliage, of which ivy formed the chief part. The nearer end of this table remained just as it had been, but on the further end a singular change had commenced. I happened to fix my eye on a little cluster of ivy-leaves. The

first of these was evidently the work of the carver; the next looked curious; the third was unmistakeable ivy; and just beyond it a tendril of clematis had twined itself about the gilt handle of one of the drawers. Hearing next a slight motion above me, I looked up, and saw that the branches and leaves designed upon the curtains of my bed were slightly in motion. Not knowing what change might follow next, I thought it high time to get up; and, springing from the bed, my bare feet alighted upon a cool green sward; and although I dressed in all haste, I found myself completing my toilet under the boughs of a great tree, whose top waved in the golden stream of the sunrise with many interchanging lights, and with shadows of leaf and branch gliding over leaf and branch, as the cool morning wind swung it to and fro, like a sinking sea-wave.

After washing as well as I could in the clear stream, I rose and looked around me. The tree under which I seemed to have lain all night, was one of the advanced guard of a dense forest, towards which the rivulet ran. Faint traces of a footpath, much overgrown with grass and moss, and with here and there pimpernel even, were discernible along the right bank. ‘This,’ thought I, ‘must surely be the path into Fairy Land, which the lady of last night promised I should so soon find.’ I crossed the rivulet, and accompanied it, keeping the footpath on its right bank, until it led me, as I expected, into the wood. Here I left it, without any good reason, and with a vague feeling that I ought to have followed its course: I took a more southerly direction.

CHAPTER 3

Man doth usurp all space,
Stares thee, in rock, bush, river, in the face.
Never yet thine eyes behold a tree;
'Tis no sea thou seést in the sea,
'Tis but a disguised humanity.
To avoid thy fellow, vain thy plan;
All that interests a man, is man.

HENRY SUTTON

The trees, which were far apart where I entered, giving free passage to the level rays of the sun, closed rapidly as I advanced, so that ere long their crowded stems barred the sunlight out, forming as it were a thick grating between me and the East. I seemed to be advancing towards a second midnight. In the midst of the intervening twilight, however, before I entered what appeared to be the darkest portion of the forest, I saw a country maiden coming towards me from its very depths. She did not seem to observe me, for she was apparently intent upon a bunch of wild flowers which she carried in her hand. I could hardly see her face; for, though she came right towards me, she never looked up. But when we met, instead of passing, she turned and walked alongside of me for a few yards, still keeping her face downwards, and busied with her flowers. She spoke rapidly, however, all the time, in a low tone, as if talking to herself, but evidently addressing the purport of her words to me. She seemed afraid of being observed by some lurking foe. 'Trust the Oak,' said she; 'trust the Oak, and the Elm, and the great Beech. Take care of the Birch, for though she is honest, she is too young not to be changeable. But shun the Ash and the Alder; for the Ash is an ogre – you will know him by his thick fingers; and the Alder will smother you with her web of hair, if you let her near you at night.' All this was uttered without pause or alteration of tone. Then she turned suddenly and left me, walking still with the same unchanging gait. I

could not conjecture what she meant, but satisfied myself with thinking that it would be time enough to find out her meaning when there was need to make use of her warning; and that the occasion would reveal the admonition. I concluded from the flowers that she carried, that the forest could not be everywhere so dense as it appeared from where I was now walking; and I was right in this conclusion. For soon I came to a more open part, and by and by crossed a wide grassy glade, on which were several circles of brighter green. But even here I was struck with the utter stillness. No bird sang. No insect hummed. Not a living creature crossed my way. Yet somehow the whole environment seemed only asleep, and to wear even in sleep an air of expectation. The trees seemed all to have an expression of conscious mystery, as if they said to themselves, 'We could, an' if we would.' They had all a meaning look about them. Then I remembered that night is the fairies' day, and the moon their sun; and I thought – Everything sleeps and dreams now: when the night comes, it will be different. At the same time, being a man and a child of the day, felt some anxiety as to how I should fare among the elves and other children of the night who wake when mortals dream, and find their common life in those wondrous hours that flow noislessly over the moveless death-like forms of men and women and children, lying strewn and parted beneath the weight of the heavy waves of night, which flow on and beat them down, and hold them drowned and senseless, until the ebb-tide comes, and the waves sink away, back into the ocean of the dark. But I took courage and went on. Soon, however, I became again anxious, though from another cause. I had eaten nothing that day, and for an hour past had been feeling the want of food. So I grew afraid lest I should find nothing to meet my human necessities in this strange place; but once more I comforted myself with hope and went on.

Before noon, I fancied I saw a thin blue smoke rising amongst the stems of larger trees in front of me; and soon I came to an open spot of ground in which stood a little cottage, so built that the stems of four great trees formed its corners, while their branches met and intertwined over its roof, heaping a great cloud of leaves over it, up towards the heavens. I wondered at finding a human dwelling in this neighbourhood; and yet it did not look altogether human, though sufficiently so to encourage me to expect some sort of food. Seeing no door, I went round to the other side, and there I found one, wide open. A woman sat beside it, preparing some vegetables for dinner. This

was homely and comforting. As I came near, she looked up, and seeing me, showed no surprise, but bent her head again over her work, and said in a low tone:

‘Did you see my daughter?’

‘I believe I did,’ said I. ‘Can you give me something to eat, for I am very hungry.’

‘With pleasure,’ she replied, in the same tone; ‘but do not say anything more, till you come into the house, for the Ash is watching us.’

Having said this, she rose and led the way into the cottage; which, I now saw, was built of the stems of small trees set closely together, and was furnished with rough chairs and tables, from which even the bark had not been removed. As soon as she had shut the door and set a chair:

‘You have fairy blood in you,’ said she, looking hard at me.

‘How do you know that?’

‘You could not have got so far into this wood if it were not so; and I am trying to find out some trace of it in your countenance. I think I see it.’

‘What do you see?’

‘Oh, never mind: I may be mistaken in that.’

‘But how then do you come to live here?’

‘Because I too have fairy-blood in me.’

Here I, in my turn, looked hard at her; and thought I could perceive, not withstanding the coarseness of her features, and especially the heaviness of her eyebrows, a something unusual – I could hardly call it grace, and yet it was an expression that strangely contrasted with the form of her features. I noticed too that her hands were delicately formed, though brown with work and exposure.

‘I should be ill,’ she continued, ‘if I did not live on the borders of the fairies’ country, and now and then eat of their food. And I see by your eyes that you are not quite free of the same need; though, from your education and the activity of your mind, you have felt it less than I. You may be further removed too from the fairy race.’

I remembered what the lady had said about my grandmothers.

Here she placed some bread and some milk before me, with a kindly apology for the homeliness of the fare, with which, however, I was in no humour to quarrel. I now thought it time to try to get some explanation of the strange words both of her daughter and herself.

‘What did you mean by speaking so about the Ash?’

She rose and looked out of the little window. My eyes followed her; but as the window was too small to allow anything to be seen from where I was sitting, I rose and looked over her shoulder. I had just time to see, across the open space, on the edge of the denser forest, a single large ash-tree, whose foliage showed bluish, amidst the truer green of the other trees around it; when she pushed me back with an expression of impatience and terror, and then almost shut out the light from the window by setting up a large old book in it.

‘In general,’ said she, recovering her composure, ‘there is no danger in the daytime, for then he is sound asleep; but there is something unusual going on in the woods; there must be some solemnity among the fairies tonight, for all the trees are restless, and although they cannot come awake, they see and hear in their sleep.’

‘But what danger is to be dreaded from him?’

Instead of answering the question, she went again to the window and looked out, saying she feared the fairies would be interrupted by foul weather, for a storm was brewing in the west.

‘And the sooner it grows dark, the sooner the Ash will be awake,’ added she.

I asked her how she knew that there was any unusual excitement in the woods. She replied:

‘Besides the look of the trees, the dog there is unhappy; and the eyes and ears of the white rabbit are redder than usual, and he frisks about as if he expected some fun. If the cat were at home, she would have her back up; for the young fairies pull the sparks out of her tail with bramble thorns, and she knows when they are coming. So do I, in another way.’

At this instant, a grey cat rushed in like a demon, and disappeared in a hole in the wall.

‘There, I told you!’ said the woman.

‘But what of the ash-tree?’ said I, returning once more to the subject. Here, however, the young woman, whom I had met in the morning, entered. A smile passed between the mother and daughter; and then the latter began to help her mother in little household duties.

‘I should like to stay here till the evening,’ I said; ‘and then go on my journey, if you will allow me.’

‘You are welcome to do as you please; only it might be better to stay all night, than risk the dangers of the wood then. Where are you going?’

‘Nay, that I do not know,’ I replied; ‘but I wish to see all that is to be seen, and therefore I should like to start just at sundown.’

‘You are a bold youth, if you have any idea of what you are daring; but a rash one, if you know nothing about it; and, excuse me, you do not seem very well informed about the country and its manners. However, no one comes here but for some reason, either known to himself or to those who have charge of him; so you shall do just as you wish.’

Accordingly I sat down, and feeling rather tired, and disinclined for further talk, I asked leave to look at the old book which still screened the window. The woman brought it to me directly, but not before taking another look towards the forest, and then drawing a white blind over the window. I sat down opposite to it by the table, on which I laid the great old volume, and read. It contained many wondrous tales of Fairy Land, and olden times, and the Knights of King Arthur’s table. I read on and on, till the shades of the afternoon began to deepen; for in the midst of the forest it gloomed earlier than in the open country. At length I came to this passage:

‘Here it chaunced, that upon their quest, Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale rencountered in the depths of a great forest. Now Sir Galahad was dight all in harness of silver, clear and shining; the which is a delight to look upon, but full hasty to tarnish, and withouten the labour of a ready squire, uneath to be kept fair and clean. And yet withouten squire or page, Sir Galahad’s armour shone like the moon. And he rode a great white mare, whose bases and other housings were black, but all besprent with fair lilys of silver sheen. Whereas Sir Percivale bestrode a red horse, with a tawny mane and tail; whose trappings were all to-smirched with mud and mire; and his armour was wondrous rosty to behold, ne could he by any art furbish it again; so that as the sun in his going down shone twixt the bare trunks of the trees, full upon the knights twain, the one did seem all shining with light, and the other all to glow with ruddy fire. Now it came about in this wise. For Sir Percivale, after his escape from the demon lady, whenas the cross on the handle of his sword smote him to the heart, and he rove himself through the thigh, and escaped away, he came to a great wood; and, in nowise cured of his fault, yet bemoaning the same, the damosel of the alder-tree encountered him, right fair to see; and with her fair words and false

countenance she comforted him and beguiled him, until he followed her where she led him to a—'

Here a low hurried cry from my hostess caused me to look up from the book, and I read no more.

'Look there!' she said; 'look at his fingers!'

Just as I had been reading in the book, the setting sun was shining through a cleft in the clouds piled up in the west; and a shadow as of a large distorted hand, with thick knobs and humps on the fingers, so that it was much wider across the fingers than across the undivided part of the hand, passed slowly over the little blind, and then as slowly returned in the opposite direction.

'He is almost awake, mother; and greedier than usual tonight.'

'Hush, child; you need not make him more angry with us than he is; for you do not know how soon something may happen to oblige us to be in the forest after nightfall.'

'But you are in the forest,' said I; 'how is it that you are safe here?'

'He dares not come nearer than he is now,' she replied; 'for any of those four oaks, at the corners of our cottage, would tear him to pieces: they are our friends. But he stands there and makes awful faces at us sometimes, and stretches out his long arms and fingers, and tries to kill us with fright; for, indeed, that is his favourite way of doing. Pray, keep out of his way tonight.'

'Shall I be able to see these beings?' said I.

'That I cannot tell yet, not knowing how much of the fairy nature there is in you. But we shall soon see whether you can discern the fairies in my little garden, and that will be some guide to us.'

'Are the trees fairies too, as well as the flowers?' I asked.

'They are of the same race,' she replied; 'though those you call fairies in your country are chiefly the young children of the flower fairies. They are very fond of having fun with the thick people, as they call you; for, like most children, they like fun better than anything else.'

'Why do you have flowers so near you then? Do they not annoy you?'

'Oh no, they are very amusing, with their mimicries of grown people, and mock solemnities. Sometimes they will act a whole play through before my eyes, with perfect composure and assurance, for they are not afraid of me. Only as soon as they have done, they burst into peals of tiny laughter, as if

it was such a joke to have been serious over anything. These I speak of, however, are the fairies of the garden. They are more staid and educated than those of the fields and woods. Of course they have near relations amongst the wild flowers, but they patronize them, and treat them as country cousins, who know nothing of life, and very little of manners. Now and then, however, they are compelled to envy the grace and simplicity of the natural flowers.'

'Do they live *in* the flowers?' I said.

'I cannot tell,' she replied. 'There is something in it I do not understand. Sometimes they disappear altogether, even from me, though I know they are near. They seem to die always with the flowers they resemble, and by whose names they are called; but whether they return to life with the fresh flowers, or whether it be new flowers, new fairies, I cannot tell. They have as many sorts of dispositions as men and women, while their moods are yet more variable: twenty different expressions will cross their little faces in half-a-minute. I often amuse myself with watching them, but I have never been able to make personal acquaintance with any of them. If I speak to one, he or she looks up in my face, as if I were not worth heeding, gives a little laugh, and runs away.' Here the woman started, as if suddenly recollecting herself, and said in a low voice to her daughter, 'Make haste – go and watch him, and see in what direction he goes.'

I may as well mention here, that the conclusion I arrived at from the observations I was afterwards able to make, was, that the flowers die because the fairies go away; not that the fairies disappear because the flowers die. The flowers seem a sort of houses for them, or outer bodies, which they can put on or off when they please. Just as you could form some idea of the nature of a man from the kind of house he built, if he followed his own taste, so you could, without seeing the fairies, tell what any one of them is like, by looking at the flower till you feel that you understand it. For just what the flower says to you, would the face and form of the fairy say; only so much more plainly as a face and human figure can express more than a flower. For the house or the clothes, though like the inhabitant or the wearer, cannot be wrought into an equal power of utterance. Yet you would see a strange resemblance, almost oneness, between the flower and the fairy, which you could not describe, but which described itself to you.

Whether all the flowers have fairies, I cannot determine, any more than I can be sure whether all men and women have souls.

The woman and I continued the conversation for a few minutes longer. I was much interested by the information she gave me, and astonished at the language in which she was able to convey it. It seemed that intercourse with the fairies was no bad education in itself. But now the daughter returned with the news, that the Ash had just gone away in a south-westerly direction; and, as my course seemed to lie eastward, she hoped I should be in no danger of meeting him if I departed at once. I looked out of the little window, and there stood the ash-tree, to my eyes the same as before; but I believed that they knew better than I did, and prepared to go. I pulled out my purse, but to my dismay there was nothing in it. The woman with a smile begged me not to trouble myself, for money was not of the slightest use there; and as I might meet with people in my journeys whom I could not recognise to be fairies, it was well I had no money to offer, for nothing offended them so much.

'They would think,' she added, 'that you were making game of them; and that is their peculiar privilege with regard to us.' So we went together into the little garden which sloped down towards a lower part of the wood.

Here, to my great pleasure, all was life and bustle. There was still light enough from the day to see a little; and the pale half-moon, half-way to the zenith, was reviving every moment. The whole garden was like a carnival, with tiny, gaily decorated forms, in groups, assemblies, processions, pairs or trios, moving stately on, running about wildly, or sauntering hither and thither. From the cups or bells of tall flowers, as from balconies, some looked down on the masses below, now bursting with laughter, now grave as owls; but even in their deepest solemnity, seeming only to be waiting for the arrival of the next laugh. Some were launched on a little marshy stream at the bottom, in boats chosen from the heaps of last year's leaves that lay about, curled and withered. These soon sank with them; whereupon they swam. ashore and got others. Those who took fresh rose-leaves for their boats floated longest; but for these they had to fight; for the fairy of the rose-tree complained bitterly that they were stealing her clothes, and defended her property bravely.

'You can't wear half you've got,' said some.

‘Never you mind; I don’t choose you to have them; they are my property.’

‘All for the good of the community!’ said one, and ran off with a great hollow leaf. But the rose-fairy sprang after him (what a beauty she was! only too like a drawing-room young lady), knocked him heels-over-head as he ran, and recovered her great red leaf. But in the meantime twenty had hurried off in different directions with others just as good; and the little creature sat down and cried, and then, in a pet, sent a perfect pink snow-storm of petals from her tree, leaping from branch to branch, and stamping and shaking and pulling. At last, after another good cry, she chose the biggest she could find, and ran away laughing, to launch her boat amongst the rest.

But my attention was first and chiefly attracted by a group of fairies near the cottage, who were talking together around what seemed a last dying primrose. They talked singing, and their talk made a song, something like this:

‘Sister Snowdrop died
  Before we were born.’
‘She came like a bride
  In a snowy morn.’
‘What’s a bride?’
  ‘What is snow?’
‘Never tried.’
  ‘Do not know.’

‘Who told you about her?’
  ‘Little Primrose there
Cannot do without her.’
  ‘Oh, so sweetly fair!’
‘Never fear,
  She will come,
Primrose dear.’
  ‘Is she dumb?’

‘She’ll come by and by.’

‘You will never see her.’
‘She went home to die,
Till the new year.’
‘Snowdrop!’ ‘’Tis no good
To invite her.’
‘Primrose is very rude,’
‘I will bite her.’

‘Oh, you naughty Pocket!
Look, she drops her head.’
‘She deserved it, Rocket,
And she was nearly dead.’
‘To your hammock – off with you!’
‘And swing alone.’
‘No one will laugh with you.’
‘No not one.’

‘Now let us moan.’
‘And cover her o’er.’
‘Primrose is gone.’
‘All but the flower.’
‘Here is a leaf.’
‘Lay her upon it.’
‘Follow in grief.’
‘Pocket has done it.’

‘Deeper, poor creature!
Winter may come.’
‘He cannot reach her—
That is a hum.’
‘She is buried, the beauty!’
‘Now she is done.’
‘That was the duty.’
‘Now for the fun.’

And with a wild laugh they sprang away, most of them towards the cottage. During the latter part of the song-talk, they had formed themselves into a funeral procession, two of them bearing poor Primrose, whose death Pocket had hastened by biting her stalk, upon one of her own great leaves. They bore her solemnly along some distance, and then buried her under a tree. Although I say *her*, I saw nothing but the withered primrose-flower on its long stalk. Pocket, who had been expelled from the company by common consent, went sulkily away towards her hammock, for she was the fairy of the calceolaria, and looked rather wicked. When she reached its stem, she stopped and looked round. I could not help speaking to her, for I stood near her. I said:

'Pocket, how could you be so naughty?'

'I am never naughty,' she said, half-crossly, half-defiantly; 'only if you come near my hammock, I will bite you, and then you will go away.'

'Why did you bite poor Primrose?'

'Because she said we should never see Snowdrop; as if we were not good enough to look at her, and she was, the proud thing! – served her right!'

'Oh, Pocket, Pocket,' said I; but by this time the party which had gone towards the house, rushed out again, shouting and screaming with laughter. Half of them were on the cat's back, and half held on by her fur and tail, or ran beside her; till, more coming to their help, the furious cat was held fast; and they proceeded to pick the sparks out of her with thorns and pins, which they handled like harpoons. Indeed, there were more instruments at work about her than there could have been sparks in her. One little fellow who held on hard by the tip of the tail, with his feet planted on the ground at an angle of forty-five degrees, helping to keep her fast, administered a continuous flow of admonitions to Pussy.

'Now, Pussy, be patient. You know quite well it is all for your good. You cannot be comfortable with all those sparks in you; and, indeed, I am charitably disposed to believe' (here he became very pompous) 'that they are the cause of all your bad temper; so we must have them all out, every one; else we shall be reduced to the painful necessity of cutting your claws, and pulling out your eye-teeth. Quiet! Pussy, quiet!'

But with a perfect hurricane of feline curses, the poor animal broke loose, and dashed across the garden and through the hedge, faster than even the fairies could follow. 'Never mind, never mind, we shall find her again; and

by that time she will have laid in a fresh stock of sparks. Hooray!' And off they set, after some new mischief.

But I will not linger to enlarge on the amusing displays of these frolicsome creatures. Their manners and habits are now so well known to the world, having been so often described by eye-witnesses, that it would be only indulging self-conceit, to add my account in full to the rest. I cannot help wishing, however, that my readers could see them for themselves. Especially do I desire that they should see the fairy of the daisy; a little, chubby, round-eyed child, with such innocent trust in his look! Even the most mischievous of the fairies would not tease him, although he did not belong to their set at all, but was quite a little country bumpkin. He wandered about alone, and looked at everything, with his hands in his little pockets, and a white nightcap on, the darling! He was not so beautiful as many other wild flowers I saw afterwards, but so dear and loving in his looks and little confident ways.

CHAPTER 4

When bale is att hyest, boote is nyest.

Ballad of Sir Aldingar

By this time, my hostess was quite anxious that I should be gone. So, with warm thanks for their hospitality, I took my leave, and went my way through the little garden towards the forest. Some of the garden flowers had wandered into the wood, and were growing here and there along the path, but the trees soon became too thick and shadowy for them. I particularly noticed some tall lilies, which grew on both sides of the way, with large, dazzlingly white flowers, set off by the universal green. It was now dark enough for me to see that every flower was shining with a light of its own. Indeed it was by this light that I saw them, an internal, peculiar light, proceeding from each, and not reflected from a common source of light as in the day-time. This light sufficed only for the plant itself, and was not strong enough to cast any but the faintest shadows around it, or to illuminate any of the neighbouring objects with other than the faintest tinge of its own individual hue. From the lilies above mentioned, from the campanulas, from the foxgloves, and every bell-shaped flower, curious little figures shot up their heads, peeped at me, and drew back. They seemed to inhabit them, as snails their shells; but I was sure some of them were intruders, and belonged to the gnomes or goblin-fairies, who inhabit the ground and earthy creeping plants. From the cups of Arum lilies, creatures with great heads and grotesque faces shot up like Jack-in-the-box, and made grimaces at me; or rose slowly and slily over the edge of the cup, and spouted water at me, slipping suddenly back, like those little soldier-crabs that inhabit the shells of sea-snails. Passing a row of tall thistles, I saw them crowded with little faces, which peeped every one from behind its flower, and drew back as quickly; and I heard them saying to each other, evidently intending me to hear, but the speaker always hiding behind his tuft, when I

looked in his direction, ‘Look at him! Look at him! He has begun a story without a beginning, and it will never have any end. He! he! he! Look at him!’

But as I went further into the wood, these sights and sounds became fewer, giving way to others of a different character. A little forest of wild hyacinths was alive with exquisite creatures, who stood nearly motionless, with drooping necks, holding each by the stem of her flower, and swaying gently with it, whenever a low breath of wind swung the crowded floral belfry. In like manner, though differing of course in form and meaning, stood a group of harebells, like little angels waiting, ready, till they were wanted to go on some yet unknown message. In darker nooks, by the mossy roots of the trees, or in little tufts of grass, each dwelling in a globe of its own green light, weaving a network of grass and its shadows, glowed the glowworms. They were just like the glowworms of our own land, for they are fairies everywhere; worms in the day, and glowworms at night, when their own can appear, and they can be themselves to others as well as themselves. But they had their enemies here. For I saw great strong-armed beetles, hurrying about with most unwieldy haste, awkward as elephant-calves, looking apparently for glowworms; for the moment a beetle espied one, through what to it was a forest of grass, or an underwood of moss, it pounced upon it, and bore it away, in spite of its feeble resistance. Wondering what their object could be, I watched one of the beetles, and then I discovered a thing I could not account for. But it is no use trying to account for things in fairy land; and one who travels there soon learns to forget the very idea of doing so, and takes everything as it comes; like a child, who, being in a chronic condition of wonder, is surprised at nothing. What I saw was this. Everywhere, here and there over the ground, lay little, dark-looking lumps of something more like earth than anything else, and about the size of a chestnut. The beetles hunted in couples for these; and having found one, one of them stayed to watch it, while the other hurried to find a glowworm. By signals, I presume, between them, the latter soon found his companion again; they then took the glowworm and held its luminous tail to the dark earthy pallet; when lo! it shot up into the air like a sky-rocket, seldom however reaching the height of the highest tree. Just like a rocket too, it burst in the air, and fell in a shower of the most gorgeously coloured sparks of every variety of hue; golden and red, and purple and

green, and blue and rosy fires crossed and intercrossed each other, beneath the shadowy heads, and between the columnar stems of the forest trees. They never used the same glowworm twice, I observed; but let him go, apparently uninjured by the use they had made of him.

In other parts, the whole of the immediately surrounding foliage was illuminated by the interwoven dances in the air of splendidly coloured fireflies, which sped hither and thither, turned, twisted, crossed, and re-crossed, entwining every complexity of intervolved motion. Here and there, whole mighty trees glowed with an emitted phosphorescent light. You could trace the very course of the great roots in the earth by the faint light that came through; and every twig, and every vein on every leaf was a streak of pale fire.

All this time, as I went on through the wood, I was haunted with the feeling that other shapes, more like my own in size and mien, were moving about at a little distance on all sides of me. But as yet I could discern none of them, although the moon was high enough to send a great many of her rays down between the trees, and these rays were unusually bright, and sight-giving, notwithstanding she was only a half-moon. I constantly imagined, however, that forms were visible in all directions except that to which my gaze was turned; and that they only became invisible, or resolved themselves into other woodland shapes, the moment my looks were directed towards them. However this may have been, except for this feeling of presence, the woods seemed utterly bare of anything like human companionship, although my glance often fell on some object which I fancied to be a human form; for I soon found that I was quite deceived; as, the moment I fixed my regard on it, it showed plainly that it was a bush, or a tree, or a rock.

Soon a vague sense of discomfort possessed me. With variations of relief, this gradually increased; as if some evil thing were wandering about in my neighbourhood, sometimes nearer and sometimes further off, but still approaching. The feeling continued and deepened, until all my pleasure in the shows of various kinds that everywhere betokened the presence of the merry fairies, vanished by degrees, and left me full of anxiety and fear, which I was unable to associate with any definite object whatever. At length the thought crossed my mind with horror: ‘Can it be possible that the Ash is looking for me? or that, in his nightly wanderings, his path is gradually

verging towards mine?' I comforted myself, however, by remembering that he had started quite in another direction; one that would lead him, if he kept it, far apart from me; especially as, for the last two or three hours, I had been diligently journeying eastward. I kept on my way, therefore, striving by direct effort of the will against the encroaching fear; and to this end occupying my mind, as much as I could, with other thoughts. I was so far successful that, although I was conscious, if I yielded for a moment, I should be almost overwhelmed with horror, I was yet able to walk right on for an hour or more. What I feared I could not tell. Indeed, I was left in a state of the vaguest uncertainty as regarded the nature of my enemy, and knew not the mode or object of his attacks; for, somehow or other, none of my questions had succeeded in drawing a definite answer from the dame in the cottage. How then to defend myself I knew not; nor even by what sign I might with certainty recognise the presence of my foe; for as yet this vague though powerful fear was all the indication of danger I had. To add to my distress, the clouds in the west had risen nearly to the top of the skies, and they and the moon were travelling slowly towards each other. Indeed, some of their advanced guard had already met her, and she had begun to wade through a filmy vapour that gradually deepened. At length she was for a moment almost entirely obscured. When she shone out again, with a brilliancy increased by the contrast, I saw plainly on the path before me – from around which at this spot the trees receded, leaving a small space of green sward – the shadow of a large hand, with knotty joints and protuberances here and there. Especially I remarked, even in the midst of my fear, the bulbous points of the fingers. I looked hurriedly all round, but could see nothing from which such a shadow should fall. Now, however, that I had a direction, however undetermined, in which to project my apprehension, the very sense of danger and need of action overcame that stifling which is the worst property of fear. I reflected in a moment, that if this were indeed a shadow, it was useless to look for the object that cast it in any other direction than between the shadow and the moon. I looked, and peered, and intensified my vision, all to no purpose. I could see nothing of that kind, not even an ash-tree in the neighbourhood. Still the shadow remained; not steady, but moving to and fro; and once I saw the fingers close, and grind themselves close, like the claws of a wild animal, as if in uncontrollable longing for some anticipated prey. There seemed but one

mode left of discovering the substance of this shadow. I went forward boldly, though with an inward shudder which I would not heed, to the spot where the shadow lay, threw myself on the ground, laid my head within the form of the hand, and turned my eyes towards the moon. Good heavens! what did I see? I wonder that ever I arose, and that the very shadow of the hand did not hold me where I lay until fear had frozen my brain. I saw the strangest figure; vague, shadowy, almost transparent, in the central parts, and gradually deepening in substance towards the outside, until it ended in extremities capable of casting such a shadow as fell from the hand through the awful fingers of which I now saw the moon. The hand was uplifted in the attitude of a paw about to strike its prey. But the face, which throbbed with fluctuating and pulsatory visibility – not from changes in the light it reflected, but from changes in its own conditions of reflecting power, the alterations being from within, not from without – it was horrible. I do not know how to describe it. It caused a new sensation. Just as one cannot translate a horrible odour, or a ghastly pain, or a fearful sound, into words, so I cannot describe this new form of awful hideousness. I can only try to describe something that is not it, but seems somewhat parallel to it; or at least is suggested by it. It reminded me of what I had heard of vampires; for the face resembled that of a corpse more than anything else I can think of; especially when I can conceive such a face in motion, but not suggesting any life as the source of the motion. The features were rather handsome than otherwise, except the mouth, which had scarcely a curve in it. The lips were of equal thickness; but the thickness was not at all remarkable, even although they looked slightly swollen. They seemed fixedly open, but were not wide apart. Of course I did not *remark* these lineaments at the time: I was too horrified for that. I noted them afterwards, when the form returned on my inward sight with a vividness too intense to admit of my doubting the accuracy of the reflex. But the most awful of the features were the eyes. These were alive, yet not with life. They seemed lighted up with an infinite greed. A gnawing voracity, which devoured the devourer, seemed to be the indwelling and propelling power of the whole ghastly apparition. I lay for a few moments simply imbruted with terror; when another cloud, obscuring the moon, delivered me from the immediately paralysing effects of the presence to the vision of the object of horror, while it added the force of imagination to the power of fear within me; inasmuch as, knowing far

worse cause for apprehension than before, I remained equally ignorant from what I had to defend myself, or how to take any precautions: he might be upon me in the darkness any moment. I sprang to my feet, and sped I knew not whither, only away from the spectre. I thought no longer of the path, and often narrowly escaped dashing myself against a tree, in my headlong flight of fear.

Great drops of rain began to patter on the leaves. Thunder began to mutter, then growl in the distance. I ran on. The rain fell heavier. At length the thick leaves could hold it up no longer; and, like a second firmament, they poured their torrents on the earth. I was soon drenched, but that was nothing. I came to a small swollen stream that rushed through the woods. I had a vague hope that if I crossed this stream, I should be in safety from my pursuer; but I soon found that my hope was as false as it was vague. I dashed across the stream, ascended a rising ground, and reached a more open space, where stood only great trees. Through them I directed my way, holding eastward as nearly as I could guess, but not at all certain that I was not moving in an opposite direction. My mind was just reviving a little from its extreme terror, when, suddenly, a flash of lightning, or rather a cataract of successive flashes, behind me, seemed to throw on the ground in front of me, but far more faintly than before, from the extent of the source of the light, the shadow of the same horrible hand. I sprang forward, stung to yet wilder speed; but had not run many steps before my foot slipped, and, vainly attempting to recover myself, I fell at the foot of one of the large trees. Half-stunned, I yet raised myself, and almost involuntarily looked back. All I saw was the hand within three feet of my face. But, at the same moment, I felt two large soft arms thrown round me from behind; and a voice like a woman's said: 'Do not fear the goblin; he dares not hurt you now.' With that, the hand was suddenly withdrawn as from a fire, and disappeared in the darkness and the rain. Overcome with the mingling of terror and joy, I lay for some time almost insensible. The first thing I remember is the sound of a voice above me, full and low, and strangely reminding me of the sound of a gentle wind amidst the leaves of a great tree. It murmured over and over again: 'I may love him, I may love him; for he is a man, and I am only a beech-tree.' I found I was seated on the ground, leaning against a human form, and supported still by the arms around me, which I knew to be those of a woman who must be rather above the human

size, and largely proportioned. I turned my head, but without moving otherwise, for I feared lest the arms should untwine themselves; and clear, somewhat mournful eyes met mine. At least that is how they impressed me; but I could see very little of colour or outline as we sat in the dark and rainy shadow of the tree. The face seemed very lovely, and solemn from its stillness; with the aspect of one who is quite content, but waiting for something. I saw my conjecture from her arms was correct: she was above the human scale throughout, but not greatly.

'Why do you call yourself a beech-tree?' I said.

'Because I am one,' she replied, in the same low, musical, murmuring voice.

'You are a woman,' I returned.

'Do you think so? Am I very like a woman then?'

'You are a very beautiful woman. Is it possible you should not know it?'

'I am very glad you think so. I fancy I feel like a woman sometimes. I do so to-night – and always when the rain drips from my hair. For there is an old prophecy in our woods that one day we shall all be men and women like you. Do you know anything about it in your region? Shall I be very happy when I am a woman? I fear not; for it is always in nights like these that I feel like one. But I long to be a woman for all that.'

I had let her talk on, for her voice was like a solution of all musical sounds. I now told her that I could hardly say whether women were happy or not. I knew one who had not been happy; and for my part, I had often longed for Fairyland, as she now longed for the world of men. But then neither of us had lived long, and perhaps people grew happier as they grew older. Only I doubted it. I could not help sighing. She felt the sigh, for her arms were still round me. She asked me how old I was.

'Twenty-one,' said I.

'Why, you baby!' said she; and kissed me with the sweetest kiss of winds and odours. There was a cool faithfulness in the kiss that revived my heart wonderfully. I felt that I feared the dreadful Ash no more.

'What did the horrible Ash want with me?' I said.

'I am not quite sure, but I think he wants to bury you at the foot of his tree. But he shall not touch you, my child.'

'Are all the ash-trees as dreadful as he?'

‘Oh, no. They are all disagreeable selfish creatures – (what horrid men they will make, if it be true!) but this one has a hole in his heart that nobody knows of but one or two; and he is always trying to fill it up, but he cannot. That must be what he wanted you for. I wonder if he will ever be a man. If he is, I hope they will kill him.’

‘How kind of you to save me from him!’

‘I will take care that he shall not come near you again. But there are some in the wood more like me, from whom, alas! I cannot protect you. Only if you see any of them very beautiful, try to walk round them.’

‘What then?’

‘I cannot tell you more. But now I must tie some of my hair about you, and then the Ash will not touch you. Here, cut some off. You men have strange cutting things about you.’

She shook her long hair loose over me, never moving her arms.

‘I cannot cut your beautiful hair. It would be a shame.’

‘Not cut my hair! It will have grown long enough before any is wanted again in this wild forest. Perhaps it may never be of any use again – not till I am a woman.’ And she sighed.

As gently as I could, I cut with a knife a long tress of flowing, dark hair, she hanging her beautiful head over me. When I had finished, she shuddered and breathed deep, as one does when an acute pain, steadfastly endured without sign of suffering, is at length relaxed. She then took the hair and tied it round me, singing a strange sweet song, which I could not understand, but which left in me a feeling like this –

‘I saw thee ne’er before;
I see thee never more;
But love, and help, and pain, beautiful one,
Have made thee mine, till all my years are done.’

I cannot put more of it into words. She closed her arms about me again, and went on singing. The rain in the leaves, and a light wind that had arisen, kept her song company. I was wrapt in a trance of still delight. It told me the secret of the woods, and the flowers, and the birds. At one time I felt as if I was wandering in childhood through sunny spring forests, over carpets of primroses, anemones, and little white starry things – I had almost said,

creatures, and finding new wonderful flowers at every turn. At another, I lay half dreaming in the hot summer noon, with a book of old tales beside me, beneath a great beech; or, in autumn, grew sad because I trod on the leaves that had sheltered me, and received their last blessing in the sweet odours of decay; or, in a winter evening, frozen-still, looked up, as I went home to a warm fire-side, through the netted boughs and twigs to the cold, snowy moon, with her opal zone around her. At last I had fallen asleep; for I know nothing more that passed, till I found myself lying under a superb beech-tree, in the clear light of the morning, just before sunrise. Around me was a girdle of fresh beech-leaves. Alas! I brought nothing with me out of fairy-land, but memories – memories. The great boughs of the beech hung drooping around me. At my head rose its smooth stem, with its great sweeps of curving surface that swelled like undeveloped limbs. The leaves and branches above kept on the song which had sung me asleep; only now, to my mind, it sounded like a farewell and a speedwell. I sat a long time, unwilling to go; but my unfinished story urged me on. I must act and wander. With the sun well risen, I rose, and put my arms as far as they would reach around the beech-tree, and kissed it, and said goodbye. A trembling went through the leaves; a few of the last drops of the night's rain fell from off them at my feet; and as I walked slowly away, I seemed to hear in a whisper once more the words: 'I may love him, I may love him; for he is a man, and I am only a beech-tree.'

CHAPTER 5

And she was smooth and full, as if one gush
Of life had washed her, or as if a sleep
Lay on her eyelid, easier to sweep
Than bee from daisy.

BEDDOES' *Pygmalion*

Sche was as whyt as lylye yn May,
Or snow that sneweth yn wynterys day.

Romance of Sir Launfal

I walked on, in the fresh morning air, as if new-born. The only thing that damped my pleasure, was a cloud of something between sorrow and delight, that crossed my mind with the frequently returning thought of my last night's hostess. 'But then,' thought I, 'if she is sorry, I could not help it; and she has all the pleasures she ever had. Such a day as this, is surely a joy to her, as much at least as to me. And her life will perhaps be the richer, for holding now within it the memory of what came, but could not stay. And if ever she is a woman, who knows but we may meet somewhere? there is plenty of room for meeting in the universe.' Comforting myself thus, yet with a vague compunction, as if I ought not to have left her, I went on. There was little to distinguish the woods today from those of my own land; except that all the wild things, rabbits, birds, squirrels, mice, and the numberless other inhabitants, were very tame; that is, they did not run away from me, but gazed at me as I passed, frequently coming nearer, as if to examine me more closely. Whether this came from utter ignorance, or from familiarity with the human appearance of beings who never hurt them, I could not tell. As I stood once, looking up to the splendid flower of a parasite, which hung from the branch of a tree over my head, a large white rabbit cantered slowly up, put one of its little feet on one of mine, and looked up at me with its red eyes, just as I had been looking up at the flower above me. I stooped and stroked it; but when I attempted to lift it, it banged

the ground with its hind feet, and scampered off at a great rate, turning, however, to look at me, several times before I lost sight of it. Now and then, too, a dim human figure would appear and disappear, at some distance, amongst the trees, moving like a sleepwalker. But no one ever came near me.

This day I found plenty of food in the forest – strange nuts and fruits I had never seen before. I hesitated to eat them; but argued that, if I could live on the air of fairy-land, I could live on its food also. I found my reasoning correct, and the result was better than I had hoped; for it not only satisfied my hunger, but operated in such a way upon my senses, that I was brought into far more complete relationship with the things around me. The human forms appeared much more dense and defined; more tangibly visible, if I may say so. I seemed to know better which direction to choose when any doubt arose. I began to feel in some degree what the birds meant in their songs, though I could not express it in words, any more than you can some landscapes. At times, to my surprise, I found myself listening attentively, and as if it were no unusual thing with me, to a conversation between two squirrels or monkeys. The subjects were not very interesting, except as associated with the individual life and necessities of the little creatures: where the best nuts were to be found in the neighbourhood, and who could crack them best, or who had most laid up for the winter, and such like; only they never said where the store was. There was no great difference in kind between their talk and our ordinary human conversation. Some of the creatures I never heard speak at all, and believe they never do so, except under the impulse of some great excitement. The mice talked; but the hedgehogs seemed very phlegmatic; and though I met a couple of moles above ground several times, they never said a word to each other in my hearing. There were no wild beasts in the forest; at least, I did not see one larger than a wild cat. There were plenty of snakes, however, and I do not think they were all harmless; but none ever bit me.

Soon after mid-day, I arrived at a bare rocky hill, of no great size, but very steep; and, having no trees – scarcely even a bush – upon it, entirely exposed to the heat of the sun. Over this my way seemed to lie, and I immediately began the ascent. On reaching the top, hot and weary, I looked around me, and saw that the forest still stretched as far as the sight could reach on every side of me. I observed that the trees, in the direction which I

was about to descend, did not come so near the foot of the hill as on the other side, and was especially regretting the unexpected postponement of shelter, because this side of the hill seemed more difficult to descend than the other had been to climb, when my eye caught the appearance of a natural path, winding down through broken rocks and along the course of a tiny stream, which I hoped would lead me more easily to the foot. I tried it, and found the descent not at all laborious; nevertheless, when I reached the bottom, I was very tired, and exhausted with the heat. But just where the path seemed to end, rose a great rock, quite overgrown with shrubs and creeping plants, some of them in full and splendid blossom: these almost concealed an opening in the rock, into which the path appeared to lead. I entered, thirsting for the shade which it promised. What was my delight to find a rocky cell, all the angles rounded away with rich moss, and every ledge and projection crowded with lovely ferns, the variety of whose forms, and groupings, and shades wrought in me like a poem; for such a harmony could not exist, except they all consented to some one end! A little well of the clearest water filled a mossy hollow in one corner. I drank, and felt as if I knew what the elixir of life must be; then threw myself on a mossy mound that lay like a couch along the inner end. Here I lay in a delicious reverie for some time; during which all lovely forms, and colours, and sounds seemed to use my brain as a common hall, where they could come and go, unbidden and unexcused. I had never imagined that such capacity for simple happiness lay in me, as was now awakened by this assembly of forms and spiritual sensations, which yet were far too vague to admit of being translated into any shape common to my own and another mind. I had lain for an hour, I should suppose, though it may have been far longer, when, the harmonious tumult in my mind having somewhat relaxed, I became aware that my eyes were fixed on a strange, time-worn bas-relief on the rock opposite to me. This, after some pondering, I concluded to represent Pygmalion, as he awaited the quickening of his statue. The sculptor sat more rigid than the figure to which his eyes were turned. That seemed about to step from its pedestal and embrace the man, who waited rather than expected.

‘A lovely story,’ I said to myself. ‘This cave, now, with the bushes cut away from the entrance to let the light in, might be such a place as he would choose, withdrawn from the notice of men, to set up his block of marble,

and mould into a visible body the thought already clothed with form in the unseen hall of the sculptor's brain. And, indeed, if I mistake not,' I said, starting up, as a sudden ray of light arrived at that moment through a crevice in the roof, and lighted up a small portion of the rock, bare of vegetation, 'this very rock is marble, white enough and delicate enough for any statue, even if destined to become an ideal woman in the arms of the sculptor.'

I took my knife and removed the moss from a part of the block on which I had been lying; when, to my surprise, I found it more like alabaster than ordinary marble, and soft to the edge of the knife. In fact, it was alabaster. By an inexplicable, though by no means unusual kind of impulse, I went on removing the moss from the surface of the stone; and soon saw that it was polished, or at least smooth, throughout. I continued my labour; and after clearing a space of about a couple of square feet, I observed what caused me to prosecute the work with more interest and care than before. For the ray of sunlight had now reached the spot I had cleared, and under its lustre the alabaster revealed its usual slight transparency when polished, except where my knife had scratched the surface; and I observed that the transparency seemed to have a definite limit, and to end upon an opaque body like the more solid, white marble. I was careful to scratch no more. And first, a vague anticipation gave way to a startling sense of possibility; then, as I proceeded, one revelation after another produced the entrancing conviction, that under the crust of alabaster, lay a dimly visible form in marble, but whether of man or woman I could not yet tell. I worked on as rapidly as the necessary care would permit; and when I had uncovered the whole mass, and, rising from my knees, had retreated a little way, so that the effect of the whole might fall on me, I saw before me with sufficient plainness – though at the same time with considerable indistinctness, arising from the limited amount of light the place admitted, as well as from the nature of the object itself – a block of pure alabaster enclosing the form, apparently in marble, of a reposing woman. She lay on one side, with her hand under her cheek, and her face towards me; but her hair had fallen partly over her face, so that I could not see the expression of the whole. What I did see, appeared to me perfectly lovely; more near the face that had been born with me in my soul, than anything I had seen before in nature or art. The actual outlines of the rest of the form were so indistinct, that the

more than semi-opacity of the alabaster seemed insufficient to account for the fact; and I conjectured that a light robe added its obscurity. Numberless histories passed through my mind of change of substance from enchantment and other causes, and of imprisonments such as this before me. I thought of the Prince of the Enchanted City, half marble and half a living man; of Ariel; of Niobe; of the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood; of the bleeding trees; and many other histories. Even my adventure of the preceding evening with the lady of the beech-tree contributed to arouse the wild hope, that by some means life might be given to this form also, and that, breaking from her alabaster tomb, she might glorify my eyes with her presence. 'For,' I argued, 'who can tell but this cave may be the home of Marble, and this, essential Marble – that spirit of marble which, present throughout, makes it capable of being moulded into any form? Then if she should awake! But how to awake her? A kiss awoke the Sleeping Beauty: a kiss cannot reach her through the incrusting alabaster.' I kneeled, however, and kissed the pale coffin; but she slept on. I bethought me of Orpheus, and the following stones; – that trees should follow his music seemed nothing surprising now. Might not a song awake this form, that the glory of motion might for a time displace the loveliness of rest? Sweet sounds can go where kisses may not enter. I sat and thought.

Now, although always delighting in music, I had never been gifted with the power of song, until I entered the fairy-forest. I had a voice, and I had a true sense of sound; but when I tried to sing, the one would not content the other, and so I remained silent. This morning, however, I had found myself, ere I was aware, rejoicing in a song; but whether it was before or after I had eaten of the fruits of the forest, I could not satisfy myself. I concluded it was after, however; and that the increased impulse to sing I now felt, was in part owing to having drunk of the little well, which shone like a brilliant eye in a corner of the cave. I sat down on the ground by the 'antenatal tomb,' leaned upon it with my face towards the head of the figure within, and sang – the words and tones coming together, and inseparably connected, as if word and tone formed one thing; or, as if each word could be uttered only in that tone, and was incapable of distinction from it, except in idea, by an acute analysis. I sang something like this: but the words are only a dull representation of a state whose very elevation precluded the possibility of

remembrance; and in which I presume the words really employed were as far above these, as that state transcended this wherein I recall it:

‘Marble woman, vainly sleeping
In the very death of dreams!
Wilt thou – slumber from thee sweeping,
All but what with vision teems –
Hear my voice come through the golden
Mist of memory and hope;
And with shadowy smile embolden
Me with primal Death to cope?
‘Thee the sculptors all pursuing,
Have embodied but their own;
Round their visions, form induing,
Marble vestments thou hast thrown;
But thyself, in silence winding,
Thou hast kept eternally;
Thee they found not, many finding –
I have found thee: wake for me.’

As I sang, I looked earnestly at the face so vaguely revealed before me. I fancied, yet believed it to be but fancy, that through the dim veil of the alabaster, I saw a motion of the head as if caused by a sinking sigh. I gazed more earnestly, and concluded that it was but fancy. Nevertheless I could not help singing again:

‘Rest is now filled full of beauty,
And can give thee up, I ween;
Come thou forth, for other duty:
Motion pineth for her queen.

‘Or, if needing years to wake thee
From thy slumbrous solitudes,
Come, sleep-walking, and betake thee
To the friendly, sleeping woods.

‘Sweeter dreams are in the forest;
Round thee storms would never rave;
And when need of rest is sorest,
Glide thou then into thy cave.

‘Or, if still thou choosest rather
Marble, be its spell on me;
Let thy slumber round me gather,
Let another dream with thee!’

Again I paused, and gazed through the stony shroud, as if, by very force of penetrative sight, I would clear every lineament of the lovely face. And now I thought the hand that had lain under the cheek, had slipped a little downward. But then I could not be sure that I had at first observed its position accurately. So I sang again; for the longing had grown into a passionate need of seeing her alive:

‘Or art thou Death, O woman? for since I
Have set me singing by thy side,
Life hath forsook the upper sky,
And all the outer world hath died.

‘Yea, I am dead; for thou hast drawn
My life all downward unto thee.
Dead moon of love! let twilight dawn;
Awake! and let the darkness flee.

‘Cold lady of the lovely stone!
Awake! or I shall perish here;
And thou be never more alone,
My form and I for ages near.

‘But words are vain; reject them all –
They utter but a feeble part:
Hear thou the depths from which they call,
The voiceless longing of my heart.’

There arose a slightly crashing sound. Like a sudden apparition that comes and is gone, a white form, veiled in a light robe of whiteness, burst upwards from the stone, stood, glided forth, and gleamed away towards the woods. For I followed to the mouth of the cave, as soon as the amazement and concentration of delight permitted the nerves of motion again to act; and saw the white form amidst the trees, as it crossed a little glade on the edge of the forest where the sunlight fell full, seeming to gather with intenser radiance on the one object that floated rather than flitted through its lake of beams. I gazed after her in a kind of despair; found, freed, lost! It seemed useless to follow, yet follow I must. I marked the direction she took; and without once looking round to the forsaken cave, I hastened towards the forest.

CHAPTER 6

Ach, hüte sich doch ein Mensch, wenn seine erfüllten Wünsche auf ihn herad regnen, und er so über alle Maasse fröhlich ist!

– FOUQUÉ, *Der Zauberring*

Ah, let a man beware, when his wishes, fulfilled, rain down upon him, and his happiness is unbounded.

Thy red lips, like worms,
Travel over my cheek.

MOTHERWELL(?)

But as I crossed the space between the foot of the hill and the forest, a vision of another kind delayed my steps. Through an opening to the westward flowed, like a stream, the rays of the setting sun, and overflowed with a ruddy splendour the open place where I was. And riding as it were down this stream towards me, came a horseman in what appeared red armour. From frontlet to tail, the horse likewise shone red in the sun-set. I felt as if I must have seen the knight before; but as he drew near, I could recall no feature of his countenance. Ere he came up to me, however, I remembered the legend of Sir Percival in the rusty armour, which I had left unfinished in the old book in the cottage: it was of Sir Percival that he reminded me. And no wonder; for when he came close up to me, I saw that, from crest to heel, the whole surface of his armour was covered with a light rust. The golden spurs shone, but the iron greaves glowed in the sunlight. The *morning star*, which hung from his wrist, glittered and glowed with its silver and bronze. His whole appearance was terrible; but his face did not answer to this appearance. It was sad, even to gloominess; and something of shame seemed to cover it. Yet it was noble and high, though thus beclouded; and the form looked lofty, although the head drooped, and the

whole frame was bowed as with an inward grief. The horse seemed to share his master's dejection, and walked spiritless and slow. I noticed, too, that the white plume on his helmet was discoloured and drooping. 'He has fallen in a joust with spears,' I said to myself; 'yet it becomes not a noble knight to be conquered in spirit because his body hath fallen.' He appeared not to observe me, for he was riding past without looking up, and started into a warlike attitude the moment the first sound of my voice reached him. Then a flush, as of shame, covered all of his face that the lifted beaver disclosed. He returned my greeting with distant courtesy, and passed on. But suddenly, he reined up, sat a moment still, and then turning his horse, rode back to where I stood looking after him.

'I am ashamed,' he said, 'to appear a knight, and in such a guise; but it behoves me to tell you to take warning from me, lest the same evil, in his kind, overtake the singer that has befallen the knight. Hast thou ever read the story of Sir Percival and the' (here he shuddered, that his armour rang) – 'Maiden of the Alder-tree?'

'In part, I have,' said I; 'for yesterday, at the entrance of this forest, I found in a cottage the volume wherein it is recorded.'

'Then take heed,' he rejoined; 'for, see my armour; – I put it off; and as it befel to him, so has it befallen to me. I that was proud am humble now. Yet is she terribly beautiful – beware. Never,' he added, raising his head, 'shall this armour be furbished, but by the blows of knightly encounter, until the last speck has disappeared from every spot where the battle-axe and sword of evil-doers, or noble foes, might fall; when I shall again lift my head, and say to my squire, "Do thy duty once more, and make this armour shine".'

Before I could inquire further, he had struck spurs into his horse and galloped away, shrouded from my voice in the noise of his armour. For I called after him, anxious to know more about this fearful enchantress; but in vain – he heard me not. 'Yet,' I said to myself, 'I have now been often warned; surely I shall be well on my guard; and I am fully resolved I shall not be ensnared by any beauty, however beautiful. Doubtless, some one man may escape, and I shall be he.' So I went on into the wood, still hoping to find, in some one of its mysterious recesses, my lost lady of the marble. The sunny afternoon died into the loveliest twilight. Great bats began to flit about with their own noiseless flight, seemingly purposeless, because its objects are unseen. The monotonous music of the owl issued from all

unexpected quarters in the half-darkness around me. The glow-worm was alight here and there, burning out into the great universe. The night-hawk heightened all the harmony and stillness with his oftrecurring, discordant jar. Numberless unknown sounds came out of the unknown dusk; but all were of twilight-kind, oppressing the heart as with a condensed atmosphere of dreamy undefined love and longing. The odours of night arose, and bathed me in that luxurious mournfulness peculiar to them, as if the plants whence they floated had been watered with bygone tears. Earth drew me towards her bosom; I felt as if I could fall down and kiss her. I forgot I was in Fairy Land, and seemed to be walking in a perfect night of our own old nursing earth. Great stems rose about me, uplifting a thick multitudinous roof above me of branches, and twigs, and leaves – the bird and insect world uplifted over mine, with its own landscapes, its own thickets, and paths, and glades, and dwellings; its own bird-ways and insect-delights. Great boughs crossed my path; great roots based the tree-columns, and mightily clasped the earth, strong to lift and strong to uphold. It seemed an old, old forest, perfect in forest ways and pleasures. And when, in the midst of this ecstasy, I remembered that under some close canopy of leaves, by some giant stem, or in some mossy cave, or beside some leafy well, sat the lady of the marble, whom my songs had called forth into the outer world, waiting (might it not be?) to meet and thank her deliverer in a twilight which would veil her confusion, the whole night became one dream-realm of joy, the central form of which was everywhere present, although unbeheld. Then, remembering how my songs seemed to have called her from the marble, piercing through the pearly shroud of alabaster – 'Why,' thought I, 'should not my voice reach her now, through the ebon night that inwraps her.' My voice burst into song so spontaneously that it seemed involuntarily.

Not a sound
But, echoing in me,
Vibrates all around
With a blind delight,
Till it breaks on thee,
Queen of Night!

Every tree,
O'ershadowing with gloom,
Seems to cover thee
Secret, dark, love-still'd,
In a holy room
Silence-filled,

Let no moon
Creep up the heaven tonight.
I in darksome noon
Walking hopefully,
Seek my shrouded light –
Grope for thee!

Darker grow
The borders of the dark!
Through the branches glow!
From the roof above,
Star and diamond-spark,
Light for love.

Scarcely had the last sounds floated away from the hearing of my own ears, when I heard instead a low delicious laugh near me. It was not the laugh of one who would not be heard, but the laugh of one who has just received something long and patiently desired – a laugh that ends in a low musical moan. I started, and, turning sideways, saw a dim white figure seated beside an intertwining thicket of smaller trees and underwood.

'It is my white lady!' I said, and flung myself on the ground beside her; striving, through the gathering darkness, to get a glimpse of the form which had broken its marble prison at my call.

'It is your white lady,' said the sweetest voice, in reply, sending a thrill of speechless delight through a heart which all the love charms of the preceding day and evening had been tempering for this culminating hour. Yet, if I would have confessed it, there was something either in the sound of the voice, although it seemed sweetness itself, or else in this yielding which awaited no gradation of gentle approaches, that did not vibrate

harmoniously with the beat of my inward music. And likewise, when, taking her hand in mine, I drew closer to her, looking for the beauty of her face, which, indeed, I found too plenteously, a cold shiver ran through me; but ‘it is the marble,’ I said to myself, and heeded it not.

She withdrew her hand from mine, and after that would scarce allow me to touch her. It seemed strange, after the fulness of her first greeting, that she could not trust me to come close to her. Though her words were those of a lover, she kept herself withdrawn as if a mile of space interposed between us.

‘Why did you run away from me when you woke in the cave?’ I said.

‘Did I?’ she returned. ‘That was very unkind of me; but I did not know better.’

‘I wish I could see you. The night is very dark.’

‘So it is. Come to my grotto. There is light there.’

‘Have you another cave, then?’

‘Come and see.’

But she did not move until I rose first, and then she was on her feet before I could offer my hand to help her. She came close to my side, and conducted me through the wood. But once or twice, when, involuntarily almost, I was about to put my arm around her as we walked on through the warm gloom, she sprang away several paces, always keeping her face full towards me, and then stood looking at me, slightly stooping, in the attitude of one who fears some half-seen enemy. It was too dark to discern the expression of her face. Then she would return and walk close beside me again, as if nothing had happened. I thought this strange; but, besides that I had almost, as I said before, given up the attempt to account for appearances in fairy land, I judged that it would be very unfair to expect from one who had slept so long and had been so suddenly awakened, a behaviour correspondent to what I might unreflectingly look for. I knew not what she might have been dreaming about. Besides, it was possible that, while her words were free, her sense of touch might be exquisitely delicate.

At length, after walking a long way in the woods, we arrived at another thicket, through the inter-texture of which was glimmering a pale rosy light.

‘Push aside the branches,’ she said, ‘and make room for us to enter.’

I did as she told me.

‘Go in,’ she said; ‘I will follow you.’

I did as she desired, and found myself in a little cave, not very unlike the marble cave. It was festooned and draperied with all kinds of green that cling to shady rocks. In the furthest corner, half-hidden in leaves, through which it glowed, mingling lovely shadows between them, burned a bright rosy flame on a little earthen lamp. The lady glided round by the wall from behind me, still keeping her face towards me, and seated herself in the furthest corner, with her back to the lamp, which she hid completely from my view. I then saw indeed a form of perfect loveliness before me. Almost it seemed as if the light of the rose-lamp shone through her (for it could not be reflected from her); such a delicate shade of pink seemed to shadow what in itself must be a marbly whiteness of hue. I discovered afterwards, however, that there was one thing in it I did not like; which was, that the white part of the eye was tinged with the same slight roseate hue as the rest of the form. It is strange that I cannot recall her features; but they, as well as her somewhat girlish figure, left on me simply and only the impression of intense loveliness. I lay down at her feet, and gazed up into her face as I lay.

She began, and told me a strange tale, which, likewise, I cannot recollect; but which, at every turn and every pause, somehow or other fixed my eyes and thoughts upon her extreme beauty; seeming always to culminate in something that had a relation, revealed or hidden, but always operative, with her own loveliness. I lay entranced. It was a tale which brings back a feeling as of snows and tempests; torrents and water-sprites; lovers parted for long, and meeting at last; with a gorgeous summer night to close up the whole. I listened till she and I were blended with the tale; till she and I were the whole history. And we had met at last in this same cave of greenery, while the summer night hung round us heavy with love, and the odours that crept through the silence from the sleeping woods were the only signs of an outer world that invaded our solitude. What followed I cannot clearly remember. The succeeding horror almost obliterated it. I woke as a grey dawn stole into the cave. The damsel had disappeared; but in the shrubbery at the mouth of the cave, stood a strange horrible object. It looked like an open coffin set up on one end; only that the part for the head and neck was defined from the shoulder-part. In fact it was a rough representation of the human frame, only hollow, as if made of decaying bark torn from a tree. It had arms, which were only slightly seamed, down from the shoulder-blade by the elbow, as if the bark had healed again from the cut of a knife. But the

arms moved, and the hands and fingers were tearing asunder a long silky tress of hair. The thing turned round – it had for a face and front those of my enchantress, but now of a pale greenish hue in the light of the morning, and with dead lustreless eyes. In the horror of the moment, another fear invaded me. I put my hand to my waist, and found indeed that my girdle of beech-leaves was gone. Hair again in her hands, she was tearing it fiercely. Once more, as she turned, she laughed a low laugh, but now full of scorn and derision; and then she said, as if to a companion with whom she had been talking while I slept, 'There he is; you can take him now.' I lay still, petrified with dismay and fear; for I now saw another figure beside her, which, although vague and indistinct, I yet recognised but too well. It was the Ash-tree. My beauty was the Maid of the Alder! and she was giving me, spoiled of my only availing defence, into the hands of my awful foe. The Ash bent his Gorgon-head, and entered the cave. I could not stir. He drew near me. His ghoul-eyes and his ghastly face fascinated me. He came stooping, with the hideous hand outstretched, like a beast of prey. I had given myself up to a death of unfathomable horror, when, suddenly, and just as he was on the point of seizing me, the dull, heavy blow of an axe echoed through the wood, followed by others in quick repetition. The Ash shuddered and groaned, withdrew the outstretched hand, retreated backwards to the mouth of the cave, then turned and disappeared amongst the trees. The other walking Death looked at me once, with a careless dislike on her beautifully moulded features; then, heedless any more to conceal her hollow deformity, turned her frightful back and likewise vanished amid the green obscurity without. I lay and wept. The Maid of the Alder-tree had befooled me – nearly slain me – in spite of all the warnings I had received from those who knew my danger.

CHAPTER 7

Fight on, my men, Sir Andrew sayes,
A little Ime hurt, but yett not slaine;
Ile but lye downe and bleede awhile,
And then lie rise and fight againe.

BALLAD *of Sir Andrew Barton*

But I could not remain where I was any longer, though the daylight was hateful to me, and the thought of the great, innocent, bold sunrise unendurable. Here there was no well to cool my face, smarting with the bitterness of my own tears. Nor would I have washed in the well of that grotto, had it flowed clear as the rivers of Paradise. I rose, and feebly left the sepulchral cave. I took my way I knew not whither, but still towards the sunrise. The birds were singing; but not for me. All the creatures spoke a language of their own, with which I had nothing to do, and to which I cared not to find the key any more. I walked listlessly along. What distressed me most – more even than my own folly – was the perplexing question – How can beauty and ugliness dwell so near? Even with her altered complexion and her face of dislike; disenchanted of the belief that clung around her; known for a living, walking sepulchre, faithless, deluding, traitorous; I felt, notwithstanding all this, that she was beautiful. Upon this I pondered with undiminished perplexity, though not without some gain. Then I began to make surmises as to the mode of my deliverance; and concluded that some hero, wandering in search of adventure, had heard how the forest was infested; and, knowing it was useless to attack the evil thing in person, had assailed with his battle-axe the body in which he dwelt, and on which he was dependent for his power of mischief in the wood. ‘Very likely,’ I thought, ‘the repentant knight, who warned me of the evil which has befallen me, was busy retrieving his lost honour, while I was sinking into the same sorrow with himself; and, hearing of the dangerous and

mysterious being, arrived at his tree in time to save me from being dragged to its roots, and buried like carrion, to nourish him for yet deeper insatiableness.' I found afterwards that my conjecture was correct. I wondered how he had fared when his blows recalled the Ash himself, and that too I learned afterwards.

I walked on the whole day, with intervals of rest, but without food; for I could not have eaten, had any been offered me; till, in the afternoon, I seemed to approach the outskirts of the forest, and at length arrived at a farm-house. An unspeakable joy arose in my heart at beholding an abode of human beings once more, and I hastened up to the door, and knocked. A kind-looking, matronly woman, still handsome, made her appearance; who, as soon as she saw me, said kindly, 'Ah, my poor boy, you have come from the wood! Were you in it last night?'

I should have ill endured, the day before, to be called *boy*; but now the motherly kindness of the word went to my heart; and, like a boy indeed, I burst into tears. She soothed me right gently; and, leading me into a room, made me lie down on a settle, while she went to find me some refreshment. She soon returned with food, but I could not eat. She almost compelled me to swallow some wine, when I revived sufficiently to be able to answer some of her questions. I told her the whole story.

'It is just as I feared,' she said; 'but you are now for the night beyond the reach of any of these dreadful creatures. It is no wonder they could delude a child like you. But I must beg you, when my husband comes in, not to say a word about these things; for he thinks me even half crazy for believing anything of the sort. But I must believe my senses, as he cannot believe beyond his, which give him no intimations of this kind. I think he could spend the whole of Midsummer-eve in the wood and come back with the report that he saw nothing worse than himself. Indeed, good man, he would hardly find anything better than himself, if he had seven more senses given him.'

'But tell me how it is that she could be so beautiful without any heart at all – without any place even for a heart to live in.'

'I cannot quite tell,' she said; 'but I am sure she would not look so beautiful if she did not take means to make herself look more beautiful than she is. And then, you know, you began by being in love with her before you saw her beauty, mistaking her for the lady of the marble – another kind

altogether, I should think. But the chief thing that makes her beautiful is this: that, although she loves no man, she loves the love of any man; and when she finds one in her power, her desire to bewitch him and gain his love, (not for the sake of his love either, but that she may be conscious anew of her own beauty, through the admiration he manifests) makes her very lovely – with a self-destructive beauty, though; for it is that which is constantly wearing her away within, till, at last, the decay will reach her face, and her whole front, when all the lovely mask of nothing will fall to pieces, and she be vanished for ever. So a wise man, whom she met in the wood some years ago, and who, I think, for all his wisdom, fared no better than you, told me, when, like you, he spent the next night here, and recounted to me his adventures.'

I thanked her very warmly for her solution, though it was but partial; wondering much that in her, as in the woman I met on my first entering the forest, there should be such superiority to her apparent condition. Here she left me to take some rest; though, indeed, I was too much agitated to rest in any other way than by simply ceasing to move.

In half an hour, I heard a heavy step approach and enter the house. A jolly voice, whose slight huskiness appeared to proceed from overmuch laughter, called out: 'Betsy, the pigs' trough is quite empty, and that is a pity. Let them swill, lass! They're of no use but to get fat. Ha! ha! ha! Gluttony is not forbidden in their commandments. Ha! ha! ha!' The very voice, kind and jovial, seemed to disrobe the room of the strange look which all new places wear – to disenchant it out of the realm of the ideal into that of the actual. It began to look as if I had known every corner of it for twenty years; and when, soon after, the dame came and fetched me to partake of their early supper, the grasp of his great hand, and the harvest-moon of his benevolent face, which was needed to light up the rotundity of the globe beneath it, produced such a reaction in me, that, for a moment, I could hardly believe that there was a Fairy Land; and that all I had passed through since I left home, had not been the wandering dream of a diseased imagination, operating on a too mobile frame, not merely causing me indeed to travel, but peopling for me with vague phantoms the regions through which my actual steps had led me. But the next moment, my eye fell upon a little girl who was sitting in the chimney corner, with a little book open on her knee, from which she had apparently just looked up to fix great inquiring eyes

upon me. I believed in Fairy Land again. She went on with her reading, as soon as she saw that I observed her looking at me. I went near, and peeping over her shoulder, saw that she was reading *The History of Graciosa and Percinet*.

'Very improving book, sir' remarked the old farmer, with a good-humoured laugh. 'We are in the very hottest corner of Fairy Land here. Ha! ha! Stormy night, last night, sir.'

'Was it, indeed?' I rejoined. 'It was not so with me. A lovelier night I never saw.'

'Indeed! Where were you last night?'

'I spent it in the forest. I had lost my way.'

'Ah! then, perhaps, you will be able to convince my good woman, that there is nothing very remarkable about the forest; for, to tell the truth, it bears but a bad name in these parts. I dare say you saw nothing worse than yourself there?'

'I hope I did,' was my inward reply; but, for an audible one, I contented myself with saying, 'Why, I certainly did see some appearances I could hardly account for; but that is nothing to be wondered at in an unknown wild forest, and with the uncertain light of the moon alone to go by.'

'Very true! you speak like a sensible man, sir. We have but few sensible folks round about us. Now, you would hardly credit it, but my wife believes every fairy-tale that ever was written. I cannot account for it. She is a most sensible woman in everything else.'

'But should not that make you treat her belief with something of respect, though you cannot share in it yourself?'

'Yes, that is all very well in theory; but when you come to live every day in the midst of absurdity, it is far less easy to behave respectfully to it. Why, my wife actually believes the story of the *White Cat*. You know it, I dare say.'

'I read all these tales when a child, and know that one especially well.'

'But, Father,' interposed the little girl in the chimney-corner, 'you know quite well that Mother is descended from that very princess who was changed by the wicked fairy into a *white cat*. Mother has told me so many times, and you ought to believe everything she says.'

'I can easily believe that,' rejoined the farmer, with another fit of laughter; 'for, the other night, a mouse came gnawing and scratching

beneath the floor, and would not let us go to sleep. Your mother sprang out of bed, and going as near it as she could, mewed so infernally like a great cat, that the noise ceased instantly. I believe the poor mouse died of the fright, for we have never heard it again. Ha! ha! ha!'

The son, an ill-looking youth, who had entered during the conversation, joined in his father's laugh; but his laugh was very different from the old man's: it was polluted with a sneer. I watched him, and saw that, as soon as it was over, he looked scared, as if he dreaded some evil consequences to follow his presumption. The woman stood near, waiting till we should seat ourselves at the table, and listening to it all with an amused air, which had something in it of the look with which one listens to the sententious remarks of a pompous child. We sat down to supper, and I ate heartily. My bygone distresses began already to look far off.

'In what direction are you going?' asked the old man.

'Eastward,' I replied; nor could I have given a more definite answer. 'Does the forest extend much further in that direction?'

'Oh! for miles and miles; I do not know how far. For although I have lived on the borders of it all my life, I have been too busy to make journeys of discovery into it. Nor do I see what I could discover. It is only trees and trees, till one is sick of them. By the way, if you follow the eastward track from here, you will pass close to what the children say is the very house of the ogre that Hop-o'-my-Thumb visited, and ate his little daughters with the crowns of gold.'

'Oh, father! ate his little daughters! No; he only changed their gold crowns for nightcaps; and the great long-toothed ogre killed them in mistake; but I do not think even he ate them, for you know they were his own little ogresses.'

'Well, well, child; you know all about it a great deal better than I do. However, the house has, of course, in such a foolish neighbourhood as this, a bad enough name; and I must confess there is a woman living in it, with teeth long enough and white enough too for the lineal descendant of the greatest ogre that ever was made. I think you had better not go near her.'

In such talk as this the night wore on. When supper was finished, which lasted some time, my hostess conducted me to my chamber.

'If you had not had enough of it already,' she said, 'I would have put you in another room, which looks towards the forest; and where you would most

likely have seen something more of its inhabitants. For they frequently pass the window, and even enter the room sometimes. Strange creatures spend whole nights in it, at certain seasons of the year. I am used to it, and do not mind it. No more does my little girl, who sleeps in it always. But this room looks southward towards the open country, and they never show themselves here; at least I never saw any.'

I was somewhat sorry not to gather any experience that I might have, of the inhabitants of Fairy Land; but the effect of the farmer's company, and of my own later adventurers, was such, that I chose rather an undisturbed night in my more human quarters; which, with their clean white curtains and white linen, were very inviting to my weariness.

In the morning, I awoke refreshed, after a profound and dreamless sleep. The sun was high, when I looked out of the window, shining over a wide, undulating, cultivated country. Various garden-vegetables were growing beneath my window. Everything was radiant with clear sunlight. The dew-drops were sparkling their busiest; the cows in a near-by field were eating as if they had not been at it all day yesterday; the maids were singing at their work as they passed to and fro between the out-houses: I did not believe in Fairy Land. I went down, and found the family already at breakfast. But before I entered the room where they sat, the little girl came to me, and looked up in my face, as though she wanted to say something to me. I stooped towards her; she put her arms round my neck, and her mouth to my ear, and whispered: –

'A white lady has been flitting about the house all night.'

'No whispering behind doors!' cried the farmer; and we entered together. 'Well, how have you slept? No bogies, eh?'

'Not one, thank you; I slept uncommonly well.'

'I am glad to hear it. Come and breakfast.'

After breakfast, the farmer and his son went out; and I was left alone with the mother and daughter.

'When I looked out of the window this morning,' I said, 'I felt almost certain that Fairy Land was all a delusion of my brain; but whenever I come near you or your little daughter, I feel differently. Yet I could persuade myself, after my last adventures, to go back, and have nothing more to do with such strange beings.'

'How will you go back?' said the woman.

‘Nay, that I do not know.’

‘Because I have heard, that, for those who enter Fairy Land, there is no way of going back. They must go on, and go through it. How, I do not in the least know.’

‘That is quite the impression on my own mind. Something compels me to go on, as if my only path was onward; but I feel less inclined this morning to continue my adventures.’

‘Will you come and see my little child’s room? She sleeps in the one I told you of, looking towards the forest.’

‘Willingly,’ I said.

So we went together, the little girl running before to open the door for us. It was a large room, full of old-fashioned furniture, that seemed to have once belonged to some great house. The window was built with a low arch, and filled with lozenge-shaped panes. The wall was very thick, and built of solid stone. I could see that part of the house had been erected against the remains of some old castle or abbey, or other great building; the fallen stones of which had probably served to complete it. But as soon as I looked out of the window, a gush of wonderment and longing flowed over my soul like the tide of a great sea. Fairy Land lay before me, and drew me towards it with an irresistible attraction. The trees bathed their great heads in the waves of the morning, while their roots were planted deep in gloom; save where on the borders the sunshine broke against their stems, or swept in long streams through their avenues, washing with brighter hue all the leaves over which it flowed; revealing the rich brown of the decayed leaves and fallen pine-cones, and the delicate greens of the long grasses and tiny forests of moss that covered the channel over which it passed in motionless rivers of light. I turned hurriedly to bid my hostess farewell without further delay. She smiled at my haste, but with an anxious look.

‘You had better not go near the house of the ogre, I think. My son will show you into another path, which will join the first beyond it.’

Not wishing to be headstrong or too confident any more, I agreed; and having taken leave of my kind entertainers, went into the wood, accompanied by the youth. He scarcely spoke as we went along; but he led me through the trees till we struck upon a path. He told me to follow it, and, with a muttered ‘good morning’, left me.

CHAPTER 8

Ich bin ein Theil des Theils, der anfangs alles war.

GOETHE – *Mephistopheles* in *Faust*

I am a part of the part, which at first was the whole.

My spirits rose as I went deeper into the forest; but I could not regain my former elasticity of mind. I found cheerfulness to be like life itself – not to be created by any argument. Afterwards I learned, that the best way to manage some kinds of painful thoughts, is to dare them to do their worst; to let them lie and gnaw at your heart till they are tired; and you find you still have a residue of life they cannot kill. So, better and worse, I went on, till I came to a little clearing in the forest. In the middle of this clearing stood a long, low hut, built with one end against a single tall cypress, which rose like a spire to the building. A vague misgiving crossed my mind when I saw it; but I must needs go closer, and look through a little half-open door, near the opposite end from the cypress. Window I saw none. On peeping in, and looking towards the further end, I saw a lamp burning, with a dim, reddish flame, and the head of a woman, bent downwards, as if reading by its light. I could see nothing more for a few moments. At length, as my eyes got used to the dimness of the place, I saw that the part of the rude building near me was used for household purposes; for several rough utensils lay here and there, and a bed stood in the corner. An irresistible attraction caused me to enter. The woman never raised her face, the upper part of which alone I could see distinctly; but, as soon as I stepped within the threshold, she began to read aloud, in a low and not altogether unpleasing voice, from an ancient little volume which she held open with one hand on the table upon which stood the lamp. What she read was something like this:

‘So, then, as darkness had no beginning, neither will it ever have an end. So, then, is it eternal. The negation of aught else, is its affirmation. Where the light cannot come, there abideth the darkness. The light doth but hollow

a mine out of the infinite extension of the darkness. And ever upon the steps of the light treadeth the darkness; yea, springeth in fountains and wells amidst it, from the secret channels of its mighty sea. Truly, man is but a passing flame, moving unquietly amid the surrounding rest of night; without which he yet could not be, and whereof he is in part compounded.'

As I drew nearer, and she read on, she moved a little to turn a leaf of the dark old volume, and I saw that her face was sallow and slightly forbidding. Her forehead was high, and her black eyes repressedly quiet. But she took no notice of me. This end of the cottage, if cottage it could be called, was destitute of furniture, except the table with the lamp, and the chair on which the woman sat. In one corner was a door, apparently of a cupboard in the wall, but which might lead to a room beyond. Still the irresistible desire which had made me enter the building, urged me: I must open that door, and see what was beyond it. I approached, and laid my hand on the rude latch. Then the woman spoke, but without lifting her head or looking at me: 'You had better not open that door.' This was uttered quite quietly; and she went on with her reading, partly in silence, partly aloud; but both modes seemed equally intended for herself alone. The prohibition, however, only increased my desire to see; and as she took no further notice, I gently opened the door to its full width, and looked in. At first, I saw nothing worthy of attention. It seemed a common closet, with shelves on each hand, on which stood various little necessaries for the humble uses of a cottage. In one corner stood one or two brooms, in another a hatchet and other common tools; showing that it was in use every hour of the day for household purposes. But, as I looked, I saw that there were no shelves at the back, and that an empty space went in further; its termination appearing to be a faintly glimmering wall or curtain, somewhat less, however, than the width and height of the doorway where I stood. But, as I continued looking, for a few seconds, towards this faintly-luminous limit, my eyes came into true relation with their object. All at once, with such a shiver as when one is suddenly conscious of the presence of another in a room where he has, for hours, considered himself alone, I saw that the seemingly luminous extremity was a sky, as of night, beheld through the long perspective of a narrow, dark passage, through what, or built of what, I could not tell. As I gazed, I clearly discerned two or three stars glimmering faintly in the distant blue. But, suddenly, and as if it had been running fast from a far

distance for this very point, and had turned the corner without abating its swiftness, a dark figure sped into and along the passage from the blue opening at the remote end. I started back and shuddered, but kept looking, for I could not help it. On and on it came, with a speedy approach but delayed arrival; till, at last, through the many gradations of approach, it seemed to come within the sphere of myself, rushed up to me, and passed me into the cottage. All I could tell of its appearance was, that it seemed to be a dark human figure. Its motion was entirely noiseless, and might be called a gliding, were it not that it appeared that of a runner, but with ghostly feet. I had moved back yet a little to let him pass me, and looked round after him instantly. I could not see him.

'Where is he?' I said, in some alarm, to the woman, who still sat reading.

'There, on the floor, behind you,' she said, pointing with her arm half-outstretched, but not lifting her eyes. I turned and looked, but saw nothing. Then with a feeling that there was yet something behind me, I looked round over my shoulder; and there, on the ground, lay a black shadow, the size of a man. It was so dark, that I could see it in the dim light of the lamp, which shone full upon it, apparently without thinning at all the intensity of its hue.

'I told you,' said the woman, 'you had better not look into that closet.'

'What is it?' I said, with a growing sense of horror.

'It is only your shadow that has found you,' she replied. 'Everybody's shadow is ranging up and down looking for him. I believe you call it by a different name in your world: yours has found you, as every person's is almost certain to do who looks into that closet, especially after meeting one in the forest, whom I dare say you have met.'

Here, for the first time, she lifted her head, and looked full at me: her mouth was full of long, white, shining teeth; and I knew that I was in the house of the ogre. I could not speak, but turned and left the house, with the shadow at my heels. 'A nice sort of valet to have,' I said to myself bitterly, as I stepped into the sunshine, and, looking over my shoulder, saw that it lay yet blacker in the full blaze of the sunlight. Indeed, only when I stood between it and the sun, was the blackness at all diminished. I was so bewildered – stunned – both by the event itself and its suddenness, that I could not at all realise to myself what it would be to have such a constant and strange attendance; but with a dim conviction that my present dislike would soon grow to loathing, I took my dreary way through the wood.

CHAPTER 9

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!

* * *

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud,
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

COLERIDGE

From this time, until I arrived at the palace of Fairy Land, I can attempt no consecutive account of my wanderings and adventures. Everything, henceforward, existed for me in its relation to my attendant. What influence he exercised upon everything into contact with which I was brought, may be understood from a few detached instances. To begin with this very day on which he first joined me: after I had walked heartlessly along for two or three hours, I was very weary, and lay down to rest in a most delightful part of the forest, carpeted with wild-flowers. I lay for half an hour in a dull repose, and then got up to pursue my way. The flowers on the spot where I had lain were crushed to the earth; but I saw that they would soon lift their heads and rejoice again in the sun and air. Not so those on which my shadow had lain. The very outline of it could be traced in the withered lifeless grass, and the scorched and shrivelled flowers which stood there, dead, and hopeless of any resurrection. I shuddered, and hastened away with sad forebodings.

In a few days, I had reason to dread an extension of its baleful influences from the fact, that it was no longer confined to one position in regard to myself. Hitherto, when seized with an irresistible desire to look on my evil demon (which longing would unaccountably seize me at any moment,

returning at longer or shorter intervals, sometimes every minute), I had to turn my head backwards, and look over my shoulder; in which position, as long as I could retain it, I was fascinated. But one day, having come out on a clear grassy hill, which commanded a glorious prospect, though of what I cannot now tell, my shadow moved round, and came in front of me. And, presently, a new manifestation increased my distress. For it began to coruscate, and shoot out on all sides a radiation of dim shadow. These rays of gloom issued from the central shadow as from a black sun, lengthening and shortening with continual change. But wherever a ray struck, that part of earth, or sea, or sky, became void, and desert, and sad to my heart. On this, the first development of its new power, one ray shot out beyond the rest, seeming to lengthen infinitely, until it smote the great sun on the face, which withered and darkened beneath the blow. I turned away and went on. The shadow retreated to its former position; and when I looked again, it had drawn in all its spears of darkness, and followed like a dog at my heels.

Once, as I passed by a cottage, there came out a lovely fairy child, with two wondrous toys, one in each hand. The one was the tube through which the fairy-gifted poet looks when he beholds the same thing everywhere; the other that through which he looks when he combines into new forms of loveliness those images of beauty which his own choice has gathered from all regions wherein he has travelled. Round the child's head was an aureole of emanating rays. As I looked at him in wonder and delight, round crept from behind me the something dark, and the child stood in my shadow. Straightway he was a common-place boy, with a rough broad-brimmed straw hat, through which brim the sun shone from behind. The toys he carried were a multiplying glass and a kaleidoscope. I sighed and departed.

One evening, as a great silent flood of western gold flowed through an avenue in the woods, down the stream, just as when I saw him first, came the sad knight, riding on his chestnut steed. But his armour did not shine half so red as when I saw him first. Many a blow of mighty sword and axe, turned aside by the strength of his mail, and glancing adown the surface, had swept from its path the fretted rust, and the glorious steel had answered the kindly blow with the thanks of returning light. These streaks and spots made his armour look like the floor of a forest in the sunlight. His forehead was higher than before, for the contracting wrinkles were nearly gone; and the sadness that remained on his face was the sadness of a dewy summer

twilight, not that of a frosty autumn morn. He, too, had met the Alder-maiden as I, but he had plunged into the torrent of mighty deeds, and the stain was nearly washed away. No shadow followed him. He had not entered the dark house; he had not had time to open the closet door. 'Will he ever look in?' I said to myself. '*Must* his shadow find him some day?' But I could not answer my own questions.

We travelled together for two days, and I began to love him. It was plain that he suspected my story in some degree; and I saw him once or twice looking curiously and anxiously at my attendant gloom, which all this time had remained very obsequiously behind me; but I offered no explanation, and he asked none. Shame at my neglect of his warning, and a horror which shrunk from even alluding to its cause, kept me silent; till, on the evening of the second day, some noble words from my companion roused all my heart; and I was at the point of falling on his neck, and telling him the whole story; seeking, if not for helpful advice, for of that I was hopeless, yet for the comfort of sympathy – when round slid the shadow and inwrapt my friend; and I could not trust him. The glory of his brow vanished; the light of his eye grew cold; and I held my peace. The next morning we parted.

But the most dreadful thing of all was, that I now began to feel something like satisfaction in the presence of the shadow. I began to be rather vain of my attendant, saying to myself; 'In a land like this, with so many illusions everywhere, I need his aid to disenchant the things around me. He does away with all appearances, and shows me things in their true colour and form. And I am not one to be fooled with the vanities of the common crowd. I will not see beauty where there is none. I will dare to behold things as they are. And if I live in a waste instead of a paradise, I will live knowing where I live.' But of this a certain exercise of his power which soon followed quite cured me, turning my feeling towards him once more into loathing and distrust. It was thus: –

One bright noon, a little maiden joined me, coming through the wood in a direction at right angles to my path. She came along singing and dancing, happy as a child, though she seemed almost a woman. In her hands – now in one, now in another – she carried a small globe, bright and clear as the purest crystal. This seemed at once her plaything and her greatest treasure. At one moment, you would have thought her utterly careless of it, and at another, overwhelmed with anxiety for its safety. But I believe she was

taking care of it all the time, perhaps not least when least occupied about it. She stopped by me with a smile, and bade me good day with the sweetest voice. I felt a wonderful liking to the child – for she produced on me more the impression of a child, though my understanding told me differently. We talked a little, and then walked on together in the direction I had been pursuing. I asked her about the globe she carried, but getting no definite answer, I held out my hand to take it. She drew back, and said, but smiling almost invitingly the while, 'You must not touch it;' – then, after a moment's pause – 'Or if you do, it must be very gently.' I touched it with a finger. A slight vibratory motion arose in it, accompanied, or perhaps manifested, by a faint sweet sound. I touched it again, and the sound increased. I touched it the third time: a tiny torrent of harmony rolled out of the little globe. She would not let me touch it any more.

We travelled on together all that day. She left me when twilight came on; but next day, at noon, she met me as before, and again we travelled till evening. The third day she came once more at noon, and we walked on together. Now, though we had talked about a great many things connected with Fairy Land, and the life she had led hitherto, I had never been able to learn anything about the globe. This day, however, as we went on, the shadow glided round and inwrapt the maiden. It could not change her. But my desire to know about the globe, which in his gloom began to waver as with an inward light, and to shoot out flashes of many-coloured flame, grew irresistible. I put out both my hands and laid hold of it. It began to sound as before. The sound rapidly increased, till it grew a low tempest of harmony, and the globe trembled, and quivered, and throbbed between my hands. I had not the heart to pull it away from the maiden, though I held it in spite of her attempts to take it from me; yes, I shame to say, in spite of her prayers, and, at last, her tears. The music went on growing in intensity and complication of tones, and the globe vibrated and heaved; till at last it burst in our hands, and a black vapour broke upwards from out of it; then turned, as if blown sideways, and enveloped the maiden, hiding even the shadow in its blackness. She held fast the fragments, which I abandoned, and fled from me into the forest in the direction whence she had come, wailing like a child, and crying, 'You have broken my globe; my globe is broken – my globe is broken!' I followed her, in the hope of comforting her; but had not pursued her far, before a sudden cold gust of wind bowed the tree-tops

above us, and swept through their stems around us; a great cloud overspread the day, and a fierce tempest came on, in which I lost sight of her. It lies heavy on my heart to this hour. At night, ere I fall asleep, often, whatever I may be thinking about, I suddenly hear her voice, crying out, ‘You have broken my globe; my globe is broken; ah, my globe!’

Here I will mention one more strange thing; but whether this peculiarity was owing to my shadow at all, I am not able to assure myself. I came to a village, the inhabitants of which could not at first sight be distinguished from the dwellers in our own land. They rather avoided than sought my company, though they were very pleasant when I addressed them. But at last I observed, that whenever I came within a certain distance of any one of them, which distance, however, varied with different individuals, the whole appearance of the person began to change; and this change increased in degree as I approached. When I receded to the former distance, the former appearance was restored. The nature of the change was grotesque, following no fixed rule. The nearest resemblance to it that I know, is the distortion produced in your countenance when you look at it as reflected in a concave or convex surface – say, either side of a bright spoon. Of this phenomenon I first became aware in rather a ludicrous way. My host’s daughter was a very pleasant pretty girl, who made herself more agreeable to me than most of those about me. For some days my companion-shadow had been less obtrusive than usual; and such was the reaction of spirits occasioned by the simple mitigation of torment, that, although I had cause enough besides to be gloomy, I felt light and comparatively happy. My impression is, that she was quite aware of the law of appearances that existed between the people of the place and myself, and had resolved to amuse herself at my expense; for one evening, after some jesting and raillery, she, somehow or other, provoked me to attempt to kiss her. But she was well defended from any assault of the kind. Her countenance became, of a sudden, absurdly hideous; the pretty mouth was elongated and otherwise amplified sufficiently to have allowed of six simultaneous kisses. I started back in bewildered dismay; she burst into the merriest fit of laughter, and ran from the room. I soon found that the same undefinable law of change operated between me and all the other villagers; and that, to feel I was in pleasant company, it was absolutely necessary for me to discover and observe the right focal distance between myself and each one with whom I had to do.

This done, all went pleasantly enough. Whether, when I happened to neglect this precaution, I presented to them an equally ridiculous appearance, I did not ascertain; but I presume that the alteration was common to the approximating parties. I was likewise unable to determine whether I was a necessary party to the production of this strange transformation, or whether it took place as well, under the given circumstances, between the inhabitants themselves.

CHAPTER 10

From Eden's bowers the full-fed rivers flow,
To guide the outcasts to the land of woe:
Our Earth one little toiling streamlet yields,
To guide the wanderers to the happy fields.

After leaving this village, where I had rested for nearly a week, I travelled through a desert region of dry sand and glittering rocks, peopled principally by goblin-fairies. When I first entered their domains, and, indeed, whenever I fell in with another tribe of them, they began mocking me with offered handfuls of gold and jewels, making hideous grimaces at me, and performing the most antic homage, as if they thought I expected reverence, and meant to humour me like a maniac. But ever, as soon as one cast his eyes on the shadow behind me, he made a wry face, partly of pity, partly of contempt, and looked ashamed, as if he had been caught doing something inhuman; then, throwing down his handful of gold, and ceasing all his grimaces, he stood aside to let me pass in peace, and made signs to his companions to do the like. I had no inclination to observe them much, for the shadow was in my heart as well as at my heels. I walked listlessly and almost hopelessly along, till I arrived one day at a small spring; which, bursting cool from the heart of a sun-heated rock, flowed somewhat southwards from the direction I had been taking. I drank of this spring, and found myself wonderfully refreshed. A kind of love to the cheerful little stream arose in my heart. It was born in a desert; but it seemed to say to itself, 'I will flow, and sing, and lave my banks, till I make my desert a paradise.' I thought I could not do better than follow it, and see what it made of it. So down with the stream I went, over rocky lands, burning with sunbeams. But the rivulet flowed not far, before a few blades of grass appeared on its banks, and then, here and there, a stunted bush. Sometimes it disappeared altogether under ground; and after I had wandered some

distance, as near as I could guess, in the direction it seemed to take, I would suddenly hear it again, singing, sometimes far away to my right or left, amongst new rocks, over which it made new cataracts of watery melodies. The verdure on its banks increased as it flowed; other streams joined it; and at last, after many days' travel, I found myself, one gorgeous summer evening, resting by the side of a broad river, with a glorious horse-chestnut tree towering above me, and dropping its blossoms, milk-white and rosy-red all about me. As I sat, a gush of joy sprang forth in my heart, and overflowed at my eyes. Through my tears, the whole landscape glimmered in such bewitching loveliness, that I felt as if I were entering Fairy Land for the first time, and some loving hand were waiting to cool my head, and a loving word to warm my heart. Roses, wild roses, everywhere! So plentiful were they, they not only perfumed the air, they seemed to dye it a faint rose-hue. The colour floated abroad with the scent, and clomb, and spread, until the whole west blushed and glowed with the gathered incense of roses. And my heart fainted with longing in my bosom. Could I but see the Spirit of the Earth, as I saw once the indwelling woman of the beech-tree, and my beauty of the pale marble, I should be content. Content! – Oh, how gladly would I die of the light of her eyes! Yea, I would cease to be, if that would bring me one word of love from the one mouth. The twilight sank around, and infolded me with sleep. I slept as I had not slept for months. I did not awake till late in the morning; when, refreshed in body and mind, I rose as from the death that wipes out the sadness of life, and then dies itself in the new morrow. Again I followed the stream; now climbing a steep rocky bank that hemmed it in; now wading through long grasses and wild flowers in its path; now through meadows; and anon through woods that crowded down to the very lip of the water.

At length, in a nook of the river, gloomy with the weight of overhanging foliage, and still and deep as a soul in which the torrent eddies of pain have hollowed a great gulf, and then, subsiding in violence, have left it full of a motionless, fathomless sorrow – I saw a little boat lying. So still was the water here, that the boat needed no fastening. It lay as if some one had just stepped ashore, and would in a moment return. But as there were no signs of presence, and no track through the thick bushes; and, moreover, as I was in Fairy Land, where one does very much as he pleases, I forced my way to the brink, stepped into the boat, pushed it, with the help of the tree-

branches, out into the stream, lay down in the bottom, and let my boat and me float whither the stream would carry us. I seemed to lose myself in the great flow of sky above me, unbroken in its infinitude, except when, now and then, coming nearer the shore at a bend in the river, a tree would sweep its mighty head silently above mine, and glide away back into the past, never more to fling its shadow over me. I fell asleep in this cradle, in which mother Nature was rocking her weary child; and while I slept, the sun slept not, but went round his arched way. When I awoke, he slept in the waters, and I went on my silent path beneath a round silvery moon. And a pale moon looked up from the floor of the great blue cave that lay in the abysmal silence beneath.

Why are all reflections lovelier than what we call the reality? – not so grand or so strong, it may be, but always lovelier? Fair as is the gliding sloop on the shining sea, the wavering, trembling, unresting sail below, is fairer still. Yea, the reflecting ocean itself reflected in the mirror, has a wondrousness about its waters that somewhat vanishes when I turn towards itself. All mirrors are magic mirrors. The commonest room is a room in a poem when I turn to the glass. (And this reminds me, while I write, of a strange story which I read in the fairy palace, and of which I will try to make a feeble memorial in its place). In whatever way it may be accounted for, of one thing we may be sure, that this feeling is no cheat; for there is no cheating in nature and the simple unsought feelings of the soul. There must be a truth involved in it, though we may but in part lay hold of the meaning. Even the memories of past pain are beautiful; and past delights, though beheld only through clefts in the grey clouds of sorrow, are lovely as Fairy Land. But how have I wandered into the deeper fairy-land of the soul, while as yet I only float towards the fairy palace of Fairy Land! The moon, which is the lovelier memory or reflex of the down-gone sun, the joyous day seen in the faint mirror of the brooding night, had rapt me away.

I sat up in the boat. Gigantic forest trees were about me; through which, like a silver snake, twisted and twined the great river. The little waves, when I moved in the boat, heaved and fell with a plash as of molten silver, breaking the image of the moon into a thousand morsels, fusing again into one, as the ripples of laughter die into the still face of joy. The sleeping woods, in undefined massiveness; the water that flowed in its sleep; and, above all, the enchantress moon, which had cast them all, with her pale eye,

into the charmed slumber, sank into my soul, and I felt as if I had died in a dream, and should never more awake.

From this I was partly aroused by a glimmering of white, that, through the trees on the left, vaguely crossed my vision, as I gazed upwards. But the trees again hid the object; and at the moment, some strange melodious bird took up its song, and sang, not an ordinary bird-song, with constant repetitions of the same melody, but what sounded like a continuous strain, in which one thought was expressed, deepening in intensity as evolved in progress. It sounded like a welcome already overshadowed with the coming farewell. As in all sweetest music, a tinge of sadness was in every note. Nor do we know how much of the pleasures even of life we owe to the intermingled sorrows. Joy cannot unfold the deepest truths, although deepest truth must be deepest joy. Cometh white-robed Sorrow, stooping and wan, and flingeth wide the doors she may not enter. Almost we linger with Sorrow for very love.

As the song concluded, the stream bore my little boat with a gentle sweep round a bend of the river; and lo! on a broad lawn, which rose from the water's edge with a long green slope to a clear elevation from which the trees receded on all sides, stood a stately palace glimmering ghostly in the moonshine: it seemed to be built throughout of the whitest marble. There was no reflection of moonlight from windows – there seemed to be none; so there was no cold glitter; only, as I said, a ghostly shimmer. Numberless shadows tempered the shine, from column and balcony and tower. For everywhere galleries ran along the face of the buildings; wings were extended in many directions; and numberless openings, through which the moonbeams vanished into the interior, and which served both for doors and windows, had their separate balconies in front, communicating with a common gallery that rose on its own pillars. Of course, I did not discover all this from the river, and in the moonlight. But, though I was there for many days, I did not succeed in mastering the inner topography of the building, so extensive and complicated was it.

Here I wished to land, but the boat had no oars on board. However, I found that a plank, serving for a seat, was unfastened, and with that I brought the boat to the bank, and scrambled on shore. Deep soft turf sank beneath my feet, as I went up the ascent towards the palace. When I reached it, I saw that it stood on a great platform of marble, with an ascent, by broad

stairs of the same, all round it. Arrived on the platform, I found there was an extensive outlook over the forest, which, however, was rather veiled than revealed by the moonlight. Entering by a wide gateway, but without gates, into an inner court, surrounded on all sides by great marble pillars supporting galleries above, I saw a large fountain of porphyry in the middle, throwing up a lofty column of water, which fell, with a noise as of the fusion of all sweet sounds, into a basin beneath; overflowing which, it ran in a single channel towards the interior of the building. Although the moon was by this time so low in the west, that not a ray of her light fell into the court, over the height of the surrounding buildings; yet was the court lighted by a second reflex from the sun of other lands. For the top of the column of water, just as it spread to fall, caught the moonbeams; and like a great pale lamp, hung high in the night air, threw a dim memory of light (as it were) over the court below. This court was paved in diamonds of white and red marble. According to my custom since I entered Fairy Land, of taking for a guide whatever I first found moving in any direction, I followed the stream from the basin of the fountain. It led me to a great open door, beneath the ascending steps of which it ran through a low arch, and disappeared. Entering here, I found myself in a great hall, surrounded with white pillars, and paved with black and white. This I could see by the moonlight, which, from the other side, streamed through open windows into the hall. Its height I could not distinctly see. As soon as I entered, I had the feeling so common to me in the woods, that there were others there besides myself, though I could see no one, and heard no sound to indicate a presence. Since my visit to the Church of Darkness, my power of seeing the fairies of the higher orders had gradually diminished, until it had almost ceased. But I could frequently believe in their presence while unable to see them. Still, although I had company, and doubtless of a safe kind, it seemed rather dreary to spend the night in an empty marble hall, however beautiful; especially as the moon was near the going down, and it would soon be dark. So I began at the place where I entered, and walked round the hall, looking for some door or passage that might lead me to a more hospitable chamber. As I walked, I was deliciously haunted with the feeling that behind some one of the seemingly innumerable pillars, one who loved me was waiting for me. Then I thought she was following me from pillar to pillar as I went along;

but no arms came out of the faint moonlight, and no sigh assured me of her presence.

At length I came to an open corridor, into which I turned; notwithstanding that, in doing so, I left the light behind. Along this I walked with outstretched hands, groping my way; till, arriving at another corridor, which seemed to strike off at right angles to that in which I was, I saw at the end a faintly glimmering light, too pale even for moonshine, resembling rather a stray phosphorescence. However, where everything was white, a little light went a great way. So I walked on to the end, and a long corridor it was. When I came up to the light, I found that it proceeded from what looked like silver letters upon a door of ebony; and, to my surprise even in the home of wonder itself, the letters formed the words, *The Chamber of Sir Anodos.* Although I had as yet no right to the honours of a knight, I ventured to conclude that the chamber was indeed intended for me; and, opening the door without hesitation, I entered. Any doubt as to whether I was right in so doing, was soon dispelled. What to my dark eyes seemed a blaze of light, burst upon me. A fire of large pieces of some sweet-scented wood, supported by dogs of silver, was burning on the hearth, and a bright lamp stood on a table, in the midst of a plentiful meal, apparently awaiting my arrival. But what surprised me more than all, was, that the room was in every respect a copy of my own room, the room whence the little stream from my basin had led me into Fairy Land. There was the very carpet of grass and moss and daisies, which I had myself designed; the curtains of pale blue silk, that fell like a cataract over the windows; the old-fashioned bed, with the chintz furniture, on which I had slept from boyhood. ‘Now I shall sleep,’ I said to myself. ‘My shadow dares not come here.’

I sat down to the table, and began to help myself to the good things before me with confidence. And now I found, as in many instances before, how true the fairy tales are; for I was waited on, all the time of my meal, by invisible hands. I had scarcely to do more than look towards anything I wanted, when it was brought me, just as if it had come to me of itself. My glass was kept filled with the wine I had chosen, until I looked towards another bottle or decanter; when a fresh glass was substituted, and the other wine supplied. When I had eaten and drunk more heartily and joyfully than ever since I entered Fairy Land, the whole was removed by several attendants, of whom some were male and some female, as I thought I could

distinguish from the way the dishes were lifted from the table, and the motion with which they were carried out of the room. As soon as they were all taken away, I heard a sound as of the shutting of a door; and knew that I was left alone. I sat long by the fire, meditating, and wondering how it would all end; and when at length, wearied with thinking, I betook myself to my own old bed, it was half with a hope that, when I awoke in the morning, I should awake not only in my own room, but in my own castle also; and that I should walk out upon my own native soil; and find that Fairy Land was, after all, only a vision of the night. The sound of the falling waters of the fountain floated me into oblivion.

CHAPTER 11

A wilderness of building, sinking far
And self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth,
Far sinking into splendour – without end!
Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,
With alabaster domes, and silver spires,
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high
Uplifted.

WORDSWORTH

But when, after a sleep, which, although dreamless, yet left behind it a sense of past blessedness, I awoke in the full morning, I found, indeed, that the room was still my own; but that it looked abroad upon an unknown landscape of forest and hill and dale on the one side – and on the other, upon the marble court, with the great fountain, the crest of which now flashed glorious in the sun, and cast on the pavement beneath, a shower of faint shadows from the waters that fell from it into the marble basin below.

Agreeably to all authentic accounts of the treatment of travellers in Fairy Land, I found by my bedside a complete suit of fresh clothing, just such as I was in the habit of wearing; for, though varied sufficiently from the one removed, it was yet in complete accordance with my tastes. I dressed myself in this, and went out. The whole palace shone like silver in the sun. The marble was partly dull and partly polished; and every pinnacle, dome, and turret ended in a ball, or cone, or cusp of silver. It was like frost-work, and too dazzling, in the sun, for earthly eyes like mine. I will not attempt to describe the environs, save by saying, that all the pleasures to be found in the most varied and artistic arrangement of wood and river, lawn and wild forest, garden and shrubbery, rocky hill and luxurious vale; in living creatures wild and tame, in gorgeous birds, scattered fountains, little streams, and reedy lakes – all were here. Some parts of the palace itself I shall have occasion to describe more minutely.

For this whole morning, I never thought of my demon shadow; and not till the weariness which supervened on delight brought it again to my memory, did I look round to see if it was behind me: it was scarcely discernible. But its presence, however faintly revealed, sent a pang to my heart, for the pain of which, not all the beauties around me could compensate. It was followed, however, by the comforting reflection that, peradventure, I might here find the magic word of power to banish the demon and set me free, so that I should no longer be a man beside myself. The Queen of Fairy Land, thought I, must dwell here: surely she will put forth her power to deliver me, and send me singing through the further gates of her country back to my own land. 'Shadow of me!' I said; 'which art not me, but which representest thyself to me as me; here I may find a shadow of light which will devour thee, the shadow of darkness! Here I may find a blessing which will fall on thee as a curse, and damn thee to the blackness whence thou hast emerged unbidden.' I said this, stretched at length on the slope of the lawn above the river; and as the hope arose within me, the sun came forth from a light fleecy cloud that swept across his face; and hill and dale, and the great river winding on through the still mysterious forest, flashed back his rays as with a silent shout of joy; all nature lived and glowed; the very earth grew warm beneath me; a magnificent dragon-fly went past me like an arrow from a bow, and a whole concert of birds burst into choral song.

The heat of the sun soon became too intense even for passive support. I therefore rose, and sought the shelter of one of the arcades. Wandering along from one to another of these, wherever my heedless steps led me, and wondering everywhere at the simple magnificence of the building, I arrived at another hall, the roof of which was of a pale blue, spangled with constellations of silver stars, and supported by porphyry pillars of a paler red than ordinary. – In this house (I may remark in passing), silver seemed everywhere preferred to gold; and such was the purity of the air, that it showed nowhere signs of tarnishing. – The whole of the floor of this hall, except a narrow path behind the pillars, paved with black, was hollowed into a huge basin, many feet deep, and filled with the purest, most liquid and radiant water. The sides of the basin were white marble, and the bottom was paved with all kinds of refulgent stones, of every shape and hue. In their arrangement, you would have supposed, at first sight, that there was no

design, for they seemed to lie as if cast there from careless and playful hands; but it was a most harmonious confusion; and as I looked at the play of their colours, especially when the waters were in motion, I came at last to feel as if not one little pebble could be displaced, without injuring the effect of the whole. Beneath this floor of the water, lay the reflection of the blue inverted roof, fretted with its silver stars, like a second deeper sea, clasping and upholding the first. This fairy bath was probably fed from the fountain in the court. Led by an irresistible desire, I undressed, and plunged into the water. It clothed me as with a new sense and its object both in one. The waters lay so close to me, they seemed to enter and revive my heart. I rose to the surface, shook the water from my hair, and swam as in a rainbow, amid the coruscations of the gems below seen through the agitation caused by my motion. Then, with open eyes, I dived, and swam beneath the surface. And here was a new wonder. For the basin, thus beheld, appeared to extend on all sides like a sea, with here and there groups as of ocean rocks, hollowed by ceaseless billows into wondrous caves and grotesque pinnacles. Around the caves grew sea-weeds of all hues, and the corals glowed between; while far off, I saw the glimmer of what seemed to be creatures of human form at home in the waters. I thought I had been enchanted; and that when I rose to the surface, I should find myself miles from land, swimming alone upon a heaving sea; but when my eyes emerged from the waters, I saw above me the blue spangled vault, and the red pillars around. I dived again, and found myself once more in the heart of a great sea. I then arose, and swam to the edge, where I got out easily, for the water reached the very brim, and, as I drew near, washed in tiny waves over the black marble border. I dressed, and went out, deeply refreshed.

And now I began to discern faint, gracious forms, here and there throughout the building. Some walked together in earnest conversation. Others strayed alone. Some stood in groups, as if looking at and talking about a picture or a statue. None of them heeded me. Nor were they plainly visible to my eyes. Sometimes a group, or single individual, would fade entirely out of the realm of my vision as I gazed. When evening came, and the moon arose, clear as the round of a horizon-sea when the sun hangs over it in the west, I began to see them all more plainly; especially when they came between me and the moon; and yet more especially, when I myself was in the shade. But, even then, I sometimes saw only the passing wave of

a white robe; or a lovely arm or neck gleamed by in the moonshine; or white feet went walking alone over the moony sward. Nor, I grieve to say, did I ever come much nearer to these glorious beings, or ever look upon the Queen of the Fairies herself. My destiny ordered otherwise.

In this palace of marble and silver, and fountains and moonshine, I spent many days; waited upon constantly in my own room with everything desirable, and bathing daily in the fairy bath. All this time I was little troubled with my demon shadow. I had a vague feeling that he was somewhere about the palace; but it seemed as if the hope that I should in this place be finally freed from his hated presence, had sufficed to banish him for a time. How and where I found him, I shall soon have to relate.

The third day after my arrival, I found the library of the palace; and here, all the time I remained, I spent most of the middle of the day. For it was, not to mention far greater attractions, a luxurious retreat from the noontide sun. During the mornings and afternoons, I wandered about the lovely neighbourhood, or lay, lost in delicious day-dreams, beneath some mighty tree on the open lawn. My evenings were by and by spent in a part of the palace, the account of which, and of my adventures in connection with it, I must yet postpone for a little.

The library was a mighty hall, lighted from the roof, which was formed of something like glass, vaulted over in a single piece, and stained throughout with a great mysterious picture in gorgeous colouring. The walls were lined from floor to roof with books and books; most of them in ancient bindings, but some in strange new fashions which I had never seen, and which, were I to make the attempt, I could ill describe. All around the walls, in front of the books, ran galleries in rows, communicating by stairs. These galleries were built of all kinds of coloured stones; all sorts of marble and granite, with porphyry, jasper, lapis lazuli, agate, and various others, were ranged in wonderful melody of successive colours. Although the material, then, of which these galleries and stairs were built, rendered necessary a certain degree of massiveness in the construction, yet such was the size of the place, that they seemed to run along the walls like cords. Over some parts of the library, descended curtains of silk of various dyes, none of which I ever saw lifted while I was there; and I felt somehow that it would be presumptuous in me to venture to look within them. But the use of the other books seemed free; and day after day I came to the library, threw

myself on one of the many sumptuous eastern carpets, which lay here and there on the floor, and read, and read, until weary; if that can be designated as weariness, which was rather the faintness of rapturous delight; or until, sometimes, the failing of the light invited me to go abroad, in the hope that a cool gentle breeze might have arisen to bathe, with an airy invigorating bath, the limbs which the glow of the burning spirit within had withered no less than the glow of the blazing sun without.

One peculiarity of these books, or at least most of those I looked into, I must make a somewhat vain attempt to describe.

If, for instance, it was a book of metaphysics I opened, I had scarcely read two pages before I seemed to myself to be pondering over discovered truth, and constructing the intellectual machine whereby to communicate the discovery to my fellow men. With some books, however, of this nature, it seemed rather as if the process was removed yet a great way further back; and I was trying to find the root of a manifestation, the spiritual truth whence a material vision sprang; or to combine two propositions, both apparently true, either at once or in different remembered moods, and to find the point in which their invisibly converging lines would unite in one, revealing a truth higher than either and differing from both; though so far from being opposed to either, that it was that whence each derived its life and power. Or if the book was one of travels, I found myself the traveller. New lands, fresh experiences, novel customs, rose around me. I walked, I discovered, I fought, I suffered, I rejoiced in my success. Was it a history? I was the chief actor therein. I suffered my own blame; I was glad in my own praise. With a fiction it was the same. Mine was the whole story. For I took the place of the character who was most like myself, and his story was mine; until, grown weary with the life of years condensed in an hour, or arrived at my death-bed, or the end of the volume, I would awake, with a sudden bewilderment, to the consciousness of my present life, recognising the walls and roof around me, and finding I joyed or sorrowed only in a book. If the book was a poem, the words disappeared, or took the subordinate position of an accompaniment to the succession of forms and images that rose and vanished with a soundless rhythm, and a hidden rhyme.

In one, with a mystical title, which I cannot recall, I read of a world that is not like ours. The wondrous account, in such a feeble, fragmentary way

as is possible to me, I would willingly impart. Whether or not it was all a poem, I cannot tell; but, from the impulse I felt, when I first contemplated writing it, to break into rhyme, to which impulse I shall give way if it comes upon me again, I think it must have been, partly at least, in verse.

CHAPTER 12

Chained is the Spring. The night-wind bold
  Blows over the hard earth;
Time is not more confused and cold,
  Nor keeps more wintry mirth.

Yet blow, and roll the world about;
  Blow, Time – blow, winter's Wind!
Through chinks of Time, heaven peepeth out,
  And Spring the frost behind.

G.E.M.

They who believe in the influences of the stars over the fates of men, are, in feeling at least, nearer the truth than they who regard the heavenly bodies as related to them merely by a common obedience to an external law. All that man sees has to do with man. Worlds cannot be without an intermundane relationship. The community of the centre of all creation suggests an interradiating connexion and dependence of the parts. Else a grander idea is conceivable than that which is already imbodied. The blank, which is only a forgotten life, lying behind the consciousness, and the misty splendour, which is an undeveloped life, lying before it, may be full of mysterious revelations of other connexions with the worlds around us, than those of science and poetry. No shining belt or gleaming moon, no red and green glory in a self-encircling twin-star, but has a relation with the hidden things of a man's soul, and, it may be, with the secret history of his body as well. They are portions of the living house wherein he abides.

Through the realms of the monarch Sun
Creeps a world, whose course had begun,
On a weary path with a weary pace,
Before the Earth sprang forth on her race:
But many a time the Earth had sped

Around the path she still must tread,
Ere the elder planet, on leaden wing,
Once circled the court of the planet's king.

There, in that lonely and distant star,
The seasons are not as our seasons are;
But many a year hath Autumn to dress
The trees in their matron loveliness;
As long hath old Winter in triumph to go
O'er beauties dead in his vaults below;
And many a year the Spring doth wear
Combing the icicles from her hair;
And Summer, dear Summer, hath years of June,
With large white clouds, and cool showers at noon;
And a beauty that grows to a weight like grief,
Till a burst of tears is the heart's relief.

Children, born when Winter is king,
May never rejoice in the hoping Spring;
Though their own heart-buds are bursting with joy,
And the child hath grown to the girl or boy;
But may die with cold and icy hours
Watching them ever in place of flowers.
And some who awake from their primal sleep,
When the sighs of Summer through forests creep,
Live, and love, and are loved again;
Seek for pleasure, and find its pain;
Sink to their last, their forsaken sleeping,
With the same sweet odours around them creeping.

Now the children, there, are not born as the children are born in worlds nearer to the sun. For they arrive no one knows how. A maiden, walking alone, hears a cry: for even there a cry is the first utterance; and searching about, she findeth, under an overhanging rock, or within a clump of bushes, or, it may be, betwixt grey stones on the side of a hill, or in any other sheltered and unexpected spot, a little child. This she taketh tenderly, and

beareth home with joy, calling out, ‘Mother, mother’ – if so be that her mother lives – ‘I have got a baby – I have found a child!’ All the household gathers round to see; – ‘*Where is it? What is it like? Where did you find it?*’ and such-like questions, abounding. And thereupon she relates the whole story of the discovery; for by the circumstances, such as season of the year, time of the day, condition of the air, and such like, and, especially, the peculiar and never-repeated aspect of the heavens and earth at the time, and the nature of the place of shelter wherein it is found, is determined, or at least indicated, the nature of the child thus discovered. Therefore, at certain seasons, and in certain states of the weather, according, in part, to their own fancy, the young women go out to look for children. They generally avoid seeking them, though they cannot help sometimes finding them, in places and with circumstances uncongenial to their peculiar likings. But no sooner is a child found, than its claim for protection and nurture obliterates all feeling of choice in the matter. Chiefly, however, in the season of summer, which lasts so long, coming as it does after such long intervals; and mostly in the warm evenings, about the middle of twilight; and principally in the woods and along the river banks, do the maidens go looking for children, just as children look for flowers. And ever as the child grows, yea, more and more as he advances in years, will his face indicate to those who understand the spirit of nature, and her utterances in the face of the world, the nature of the place of his birth, and the other circumstances thereof; whether a clear morning sun guided his mother to the nook whence issued the boy’s low cry; or at eve the lonely maiden (for the same woman never finds a second, at least while the first lives) discovers the girl by the glimmer of her white skin, lying in a nest like that of the lark, amid long encircling grasses, and the upward-gazing eyes of the lowly daisies; whether the storm bowed the forest trees around, or the still frost fixed in silence the else flowing and babbling stream.

After they grow up, the men and women are but little together. There is this peculiar difference between them, which likewise distinguishes the women from those of the earth. The men alone have arms; the women have only wings. Resplendent wings are they, wherein they can shroud themselves from head to foot in a panoply of glistering glory. By these wings alone, it may frequently be judged in what seasons, and under what aspects they were born. From those that came in winter, go great white

wings, white as snow; the edge of every feather shining like the sheen of silver, so that they flash and glitter like frost in the sun. But underneath, they are tinged with a faint pink or rose-colour. Those born in spring have wings of a brilliant green, green as grass; and towards the edges the feathers are enamelled like the surface of the grass-blades. These again are white within. Those that are born in summer have wings of a deep rose-colour, lined with pale gold. And those born in autumn have purple wings, with a rich brown on the inside. But these colours are modified and altered in all varieties, corresponding to the mood of the day and hour, as well as the season of the year; and sometimes I found the various colours so intermingled, that I could not determine even the season, though doubtless the hieroglyphic could be deciphered by more experienced eyes. One splendour, in particular, I remember – wings of deep carmine, with an inner down of warm grey, around a form of brilliant whiteness. She had been found as the sun went down through a low sea-fog, casting crimson along a broad sea-path into a little cave on the shore, where a bathing maiden saw her lying.

But though I speak of sun and fog, and sea and shore, the world there is in some respects very different from the earth whereon men live. For instance, the waters reflect no forms. To the unaccustomed eye they appear, if undisturbed, like the surface of a dark metal, only that the latter would reflect indistinctly, whereas they reflect not at all, except light which falls immediately upon them. This has a great effect in causing the landscapes to differ from those on the earth. On the stillest evening, no tall ship on the sea sends a long wavering reflection almost to the feet of him on the shore; the face of no maiden brightens at its own beauty in a still forest-well. The sun and moon alone make a glitter on the surface. The sea is like a sea of death, ready to ingulf and never to reveal: a visible shadow of oblivion. Yet the women sport in its waters like gorgeous sea-birds. The men more rarely enter them. But, on the contrary, the sky reflects everything beneath it, as if it were built of water like ours. Of course, from its concavity there is some distortion of the reflected objects, yet wondrous combinations of form are often to be seen in the overhanging depth. And then it is not shaped so much like a round dome as the sky of the earth, but, more of an egg-shape, rises to a great towering height in the middle, appearing far more lofty than the other. When the stars come out at night, it shows a mighty cupola,

‘fretted with golden fires’, wherein there is room for all tempests to rush and rave.

One evening in early summer, I stood with a group of men and women on a steep rock that overhung the sea. They were all questioning me about my world and the ways thereof. In making reply to one of their questions, I was compelled to say that children are not born in the Earth as with them. Upon this I was assailed with a whole battery of inquiries, which at first I tried to avoid; but, at last, I was compelled, in the vaguest manner I could invent, to make some approach to the subject in question. Immediately a dim notion of what I meant, seemed to dawn in the minds of most of the women. Some of them folded their great wings all around them, as they generally do when in the least offended, and stood erect and motionless. One spread out her rosy pinions, and flashed from the promontory into the gulf at its foot. A great light shone in the eyes of one maiden, who turned and walked slowly away, with her purple and white wings half dispread behind her. She was found, the next morning, dead beneath a withered tree on a bare hill-side, some miles inland. They buried her where she lay, as is their custom; for, before they die, they instinctively search for a spot like the place of their birth, and having found one that satisfies them, they lie down, fold their wings around them, if they be women, or cross their arms over their breasts, if they are men, just as if they were going to sleep; and so sleep indeed. The sign or cause of coming death is an indescribable longing for something, they know not what, which seizes them, and drives them into solitude, consuming them within, till the body fails. When a youth and a maiden look too deep into each other’s eyes, this longing seizes and possesses them; but instead of drawing nearer to each other, they wander away, each alone, into solitary places, and die of their desire. But it seems to me, that thereafter they are born babes upon our earth; where, if, when grown, they find each other, it goes well with them; if not, it will seem to go ill. But of this I know nothing. When I told them that the women on the Earth had not wings like them, but arms, they stared, and said how bold and masculine they must look; not knowing that their wings, glorious as they are, are but undeveloped arms.

But see the power of this book, that, while recounting what I can recall of its contents, I write as if myself had visited the far-off planet, learned its

ways and appearances, and conversed with its men and women. And so, while writing, it seemed to me that I had.

The book goes on with the story of a maiden, who, born at the close of autumn, and living in a long, to her endless, winter, set out at last to find the regions of spring; for, as in our earth, the seasons are divided over the globe. It begins something like this:

She watched them dying for many a day,
Dropping from off the old trees away,
One by one; or else in a shower
Crowding over the withered flower.
For as if they had done some grievous wrong,
The sun, that had nursed them and loved them so long,
Grew weary of loving, and, turning back,
Hastened away on his southern track;
And helplessly hung each shrivelled leaf,
Faded away with an idle grief.
And the gusts of wind, sad Autumn's sighs,
Mournfully swept through their families;
Casting away with a helpless moan
All that he yet might call his own,
As the child, when his bird is gone for ever,
Flingeth the cage on the wandering river.
And the giant trees, as bare as Death,
Slowly bowed to the great Wind's breath;
And groaned with trying to keep from groaning
Amidst the young trees bending and moaning.
And the ancient planet's mighty sea
Was heaving and falling most restlessly,
And the tops of the waves were broken and white,
Tossing about to ease their might;
And the river was striving to reach the main,
And the ripple was hurrying back again.
Nature lived in sadness now;
Sadness lived on the maiden's brow,
As she watched, with a fixed, half-conscious eye,

One lonely leaf that trembled on high,
Till it dropped at last from the desolate bough –
Sorrow, oh, sorrow! 'tis winter now.
And her tears gushed forth, though it was but a leaf,
For little will loose the swollen fountain of grief:
When up to the lip the water goes,
It needs but a drop, and it overflows.

Oh! many and many a dreary year
Must pass away ere the buds appear;
Many a night of darksome sorrow
Yield to the light of a joyless morrow,
Ere birds again, on the clothed trees,
Shall fill the branches with melodies.
She will dream of meadows with wakeful streams;
Of wavy grass in the sunny beams;
Of hidden wells that soundless spring,
Hoarding their joy as a holy thing;
Of founts that tell it all day long
To the listening woods, with exultant song;
She will dream of evenings that die into nights,
Where each sense is filled with its own delights,
And the soul is still as the vaulted sky,
Lulled with an inner harmony;
And the flowers give out to the dewy night,
Changed into perfume, the gathered light;
And the darkness sinks upon all their host,
Till the sun sail up on the eastern coast –
She will wake and see the branches bare,
Weaving a net in the frozen air.

The story goes on to tell how, at last, weary with wintriness, she travelled towards the southern regions of her globe, to meet the spring on its slow way northwards; and how, after many sad adventures, many disappointed hopes, and many tears, bitter and fruitless, she found at last, one stormy afternoon, in a leafless forest, a single snowdrop growing betwixt the

borders of the winter and spring. She lay down beside it and died. I almost believe that a child, pale and peaceful as a snowdrop, was born in the Earth within a fixed season from that stormy afternoon.

CHAPTER 13

I saw a ship sailing upon the sea,
Deeply laden as ship could be;
But not so deep as in love I am,
For I care not whether I sink or swim.

OLD BALLAD

But Love is such a Mystery
  I cannot find it out:
For when I think I'm best resolv'd,
  I then am in most doubt.

SIR JOHN SUCKLING

One story I will try to reproduce. But, alas! it is like trying to reconstruct a forest out of broken branches and withered leaves. In the fairy book, everything was just as it should be, though whether in words or something else, I cannot tell. It glowed and flashed the thoughts upon the soul, with such a power that the medium disappeared from the consciousness, and it was occupied only with the things themselves. My representation of it must resemble a translation from a rich and powerful language, capable of embodying the thoughts of a splendidly developed people, into the meagre and half-articulate speech of a savage tribe. Of course, while I read it, I was Cosmo, and his history was mine. Yet, all the time, I seemed to have a kind of double consciousness, and the story a double meaning. Sometimes it seemed only to represent a simple story of ordinary life, perhaps almost of universal life; wherein two souls, loving each other and longing to come nearer, do, after all, but behold each other as in a glass darkly.

As through the hard rock go the branching silver veins; as into the solid land run the creeks and gulfs from the unresting sea; as the lights and influences of the upper worlds sink silently through the earth's atmosphere; so doth Faerie invade the world of men, and sometimes startle the common eye with an association as of cause and effect, when between the two no connecting links can be traced.

Cosmo von Wehrstahl was a student at the University of Prague. Though of a noble family, he was poor, and prided himself upon the independence that poverty gives; for what will not a man pride himself upon, when he cannot get rid of it? A favourite with his fellow students, he yet had no companions; and none of them had ever crossed the threshold of his lodging in the top of one of the highest houses in the old town. Indeed, the secret of much of that complaisance which recommended him to his fellows, was the thought of his unknown retreat, whither in the evening he could betake himself, and indulge undisturbed in his own studies and reveries. These studies, besides those subjects necessary to his course at the University, embraced some less commonly known and approved; for in a secret drawer lay the works of Albertus Magnus and Cornelius Agrippa, along with others less read and more abstruse. As yet, however, he had followed these researches only from curiosity, and had turned them to no practical purpose.

His lodging consisted of one large low-ceiled room, singularly bare of furniture; for besides a couple of wooden chairs, a couch which served for dreaming on both by day and night, and a great press of black oak, there was very little in the room that could be called furniture. But curious instruments were heaped in the corners; and in one stood a skeleton, half-leaning against the wall, half-supported by a string about its neck. One of its hands, all of fingers, rested on the heavy pommel of a great sword that stood beside it. Various weapons were scattered about over the floor. The walls were utterly bare of adornment; for the few strange things, such as a large dried bat with its wings dispread, the skin of a porcupine, and a stuffed sea-mouse, could hardly be reckoned as such. But although his fancy delighted in vagaries like these, he indulged his imagination with far different fare. His mind had never yet been filled with an absorbing passion; but it lay like a still twilight open to any wind, whether the low breath that wafts but odours, or the storm that bows the great trees till they strain and creak. He saw everything as through a rose-coloured glass. When he looked

from his window on the street below, not a maiden passed, but she moved as in a story, and drew his thoughts after her till she disappeared in the vista. When he walked in the streets, he always felt as if reading a tale, into which he sought to weave every face of interest that went by; and every sweet voice swept his soul as with the wing of a passing angel. He was in fact a poet without words; the more absorbed and endangered, that the springing waters were dammed back into his soul, where, finding no utterance, they grew, and swelled, and undermined. He used to lie on his hard couch, and read a tale or a poem, till the book dropped from his hand; but he dreamed on, he knew not whether awake or asleep, until the opposite roof grew upon his sense, and turned golden in the sunrise. Then he arose too; and the impulses of vigorous youth kept him ever active, either in study or in sport, until again the close of the day left him free; and the world of night, which had lain drowned in the cataract of the day, rose up in his soul, with all its stars, and dim-seen phantom shapes. But this could hardly last long. Some one form must sooner or later step within the charmed circle, enter the house of life, and compel the bewildered magician to kneel and worship.

One afternoon, towards dusk, he was wandering dreamily in one of the principal streets, when a fellow-student roused him by a slap on the shoulder, and asked him to accompany him into a little back alley to look at some old armour which he had taken a fancy to possess. Cosmo was considered an authority in every matter pertaining to arms, ancient or modern. In the use of weapons, none of the students could come near him; and his practical acquaintance with some had principally contributed to establish his authority in reference to all. He accompanied him willingly. They entered a narrow alley, and thence a dirty little court, where a low arched door admitted them into a heterogeneous assemblage of everything musty, and dusty, and old, that could well be imagined. His verdict on the armour was satisfactory, and his companion at once concluded the purchase. As they were leaving the place, Cosmo’s eye was attracted by an old mirror of an elliptical shape, which leaned against the wall, covered with dust. Around it was some curious carving, which he could see but very indistinctly by the glimmering light which the owner of the shop carried in his hand. It was this carving that attracted his attention; at least so it appeared to him. He left the place, however, with his friend, taking no

further notice of it. They walked together to the main street where they parted and took opposite directions.

No sooner was Cosmo left alone, than the thought of the curious old mirror returned to him. A strong desire to see it more plainly arose within him, and he directed his steps once more towards the shop. The owner opened the door when he knocked, as if he had expected him. He was a little, old, withered man, with a hooked nose, and burning eyes constantly in a slow restless motion, and looking here and there as if after something that eluded them. Pretending to examine several other articles, Cosmo at last approached the mirror, and requested to have it taken down.

'Take it down yourself, master; I cannot reach it,' said the old man.

Cosmo took it down carefully, when he saw that the carving was indeed delicate and costly, being both of admirable design and execution; containing withal many devices which seemed to embody some meaning to which he had no clue. This, naturally, in one of his tastes and temperament, increased the interest he felt in the old mirror; so much, indeed, that he now longed to possess it, in order to study its frame at his leisure. He pretended, however, to want it only for use; and saying he feared the plate could be of little service, as it was rather old, he brushed away a little of the dust from its face, expecting to see a dull reflection within. His surprise was great when he found the reflection brilliant, revealing a glass not only uninjured by age, but wondrously clear and perfect (should the whole correspond to this part) even for one newly from the hands of the maker. He asked carelessly what the owner wanted for the thing. The old man replied by mentioning a sum of money far beyond the reach of poor Cosmo, who proceeded to replace the mirror where it had stood before.

'You think the price too high?' said the old man.

'I do not know that it is too much for you to ask,' replied Cosmo; 'but it is far too much for me to give.'

The old man held up his light towards Cosmo's face. 'I like your look,' said he.

Cosmo could not return the compliment. In fact, now he looked closely at him for the first time, he felt a kind of repugnance to him, mingled with a strange feeling of doubt whether a man or woman stood before him.

'What is your name?' he continued.

'Cosmo von Wehrstahl.'

‘Ah, ah! I thought as much. I see your father in you. I knew your father very well, young sir. I dare say in some odd corners of my house, you might find some old things with his crest and cipher upon them still. Well, I like you: you shall have the mirror at the fourth part of what I asked for it; but upon one condition.’

‘What is that?’ said Cosmo; for, although the price was still a great deal for him to give, he could just manage it; and the desire to possess the mirror had increased to an altogether unaccountable degree, since it had seemed beyond his reach.

‘That if you should ever want to get rid of it again, you will let me have the first offer.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Cosmo, with a smile; adding, ‘a moderate condition indeed.’

‘On your honour?’ insisted the seller.

‘On my honour,’ said the buyer; and the bargain was concluded.

‘I will carry it home for you,’ said the old man, as Cosmo took it in his hands.

‘No, no; I will carry it myself,’ said he; for he had a peculiar dislike to revealing his residence to any one, and more especially to this person, to whom he felt every moment a greater antipathy.

‘Just as you please,’ said the old creature, and muttered to himself as he held his light at the door to show him out of the court: ‘Sold for the sixth time! I wonder what will be the upshot of it this time. I should think my lady had enough of it by now!’

Cosmo carried his prize carefully home. But all the way he had an uncomfortable feeling that he was watched and dogged. Repeatedly he looked about, but saw nothing to justify his suspicions. Indeed, the streets were too crowded and too ill lighted to expose very readily a careful spy, if such there should be at his heels. He reached his lodging in safety, and leaned his purchase against the wall, rather relieved, strong as he was, to be rid of its weight; then, lighting his pipe, threw himself on the couch, and was soon lapt in the folds of one of his haunting dreams.

He returned home earlier than usual the next day, and fixed the mirror to the wall, over the hearth, at one end of his long room. He then carefully wiped away the dust from its face, and, clear as the water of a sunny spring, the mirror shone out from beneath the envious covering. But his interest was chiefly occupied with the curious carving of the frame. This he cleaned as well as he could with a brush; and then he proceeded to a minute examination of its various parts, in the hope of discovering some index to the intention of the carver. In this, however, he was unsuccessful; and, at length, pausing with some weariness and disappointment, he gazed vacantly for a few moments into the depth of the reflected room. But ere long he said, half aloud: 'What a strange thing a mirror is! and what a wondrous affinity exists between it and a man's imagination! For this room of mine, as I behold it in the glass, is the same, and yet not the same. It is not the mere representation of the room I live in, but it looks just as if I were reading about it in a story I like. All its commonness has disappeared. The mirror has lifted it out of the region of fact into the realm of art; and the very representing of it to me has clothed with interest that which was otherwise hard and bare; just as one sees with delight upon the stage the representation of a character from which one would escape in life as from something unendurably wearisome. But is it not rather that art rescues nature from the weary and sated regards of our senses, and the degrading injustice of our anxious every-day life, and, appealing to the imagination, which dwells apart, reveals nature in some degree as she really is, and as she represents herself to the eye of the child, whose every-day life, fearless and unambitious, meets the true import of the wonder-teeming world around him, and rejoices therein without questioning? That skeleton, now – I almost fear it, standing there so still, with eyes only for the unseen, like a watch-tower looking across all the waste of this busy world into the quiet regions of rest beyond. And yet I know every bone and every joint in it as well as my own fist. And that old battle-axe looks as if any moment it might be caught up by a mailed hand, and, borne forth by the mighty arm, go crashing through casque, and skull, and brain, invading the Unknown with yet another bewildered ghost. I should like to live in *that* room if I could only get into it.'

Scarcely had the half-moulded words floated from him, as he stood gazing into the mirror, when, striking him as with a flash of amazement that

fixed him in his posture, noiseless and unannounced, glided suddenly through the door into the reflected room, with stately motion, yet reluctant and faltering step, the graceful form of a woman, clothed all in white. Her back only was visible as she walked slowly up to the couch in the further end of the room, on which she laid herself wearily, turning towards him a face of unutterable loveliness, in which suffering, and dislike, and a sense of compulsion, strangely mingled with the beauty. He stood without the power of motion for some moments, with his eyes irrecoverably fixed upon her; and even after he was conscious of the ability to move, he could not summon up courage to turn and look on her, face to face, in the veritable chamber in which he stood. At length, with a sudden effort, in which the exercise of the will was so pure, that it seemed involuntary, he turned his face to the couch. It was vacant. In bewilderment, mingled with terror, he turned again to the mirror: there, on the reflected couch, lay the exquisite lady-form. She lay with closed eyes, whence two large tears were just welling from beneath the veiling lids; still as death, save for the convulsive motion of her bosom.

Cosmo himself could not have described what he felt. His emotions were of a kind that destroyed consciousness, and could never be clearly recalled. He could not help standing yet by the mirror, and keeping his eyes fixed on the lady, though he was painfully aware of his rudeness, and feared every moment that she would open hers, and meet his fixed regard. But he was, ere long, a little relieved; for, after a while, her eyelids slowly rose, and her eyes remained uncovered, but unemployed for a time; and when, at length, they began to wander about the room, as if languidly seeking to make some acquaintance with her environment, they were never directed towards him: it seemed nothing but what was in the mirror could affect her vision; and, therefore, if she saw him at all, it could only be his back, which, of necessity, was turned towards her in the glass. The two figures in the mirror could not meet face to face, except he turned and looked at her, present in his room; and, as she was not there, he concluded that if he were to turn towards the part in his room corresponding to that in which she lay, his reflection would either be invisible to her altogether, or at least it must appear to her to gaze vacantly towards her, and no meeting of the eyes would produce the impression of spiritual proximity. By and by her eyes fell upon the skeleton, and he saw her shudder and close them. She did not

open them again, but signs of repugnance continued evident on her countenance. Cosmo would have removed the obnoxious thing at once, but he feared to discompose her yet more by the assertion of his presence, which the act would involve. So he stood and watched her. The eyelids yet shrouded the eyes, as a costly case the jewels within; the troubled expression gradually faded from the countenance, leaving only a faint sorrow behind; the features settled into an unchanging expression of rest; and by these signs, and the slow regular motion of her breathing, Cosmo knew that she slept. He could now gaze on her without embarrassment. He saw that her figure, dressed in the simplest robe of white, was worthy of her face; and so harmonious, that either the delicately-moulded foot, or any finger of the equally delicate hand, was an index to the whole. As she lay, her whole form manifested the relaxation of perfect repose. He gazed till he was weary, and at last seated himself near the new-found shrine, and mechanically took up a book, like one who watches by a sick-bed. But his eyes gathered no thoughts from the page before him. His intellect had been stunned by the bold contradiction, to its face, of all its experience, and now lay passive, without assertion, or speculation, or even conscious astonishment; while his imagination sent one wild dream of blessedness after another coursing through his soul. How long he sat he knew not; but at length he roused himself, rose, and, trembling in every portion of his frame, looked again into the mirror. She was gone. The mirror reflected faithfully what his room presented, and nothing more. It stood there like a golden setting whence the central jewel has been stolen away; like a night-sky without the glory of its stars. She had carried with her all the strangeness of the reflected room. It had sunk to the level of the one without. But when the first pangs of his disappointment had passed, Cosmo began to comfort himself with the hope that she might return, perhaps the next evening, at the same hour. Resolving that if she did, she should not at least be scared by the hateful skeleton, he removed that and several other articles of questionable appearance into a recess by the side of the hearth, whence they could not possibly cast any reflection into the mirror; and having made his poor room as tidy as he could, sought the solace of the open sky and of a night wind that had begun to blow; for he could not rest where he was. When he returned, somewhat composed, he could hardly prevail with himself to lie down on his bed; for he could not help feeling as if she had lain upon it; and

for him to lie there now would be something like sacrilege. However, weariness prevailed; and laying himself on the couch, dressed as he was, he slept till day.

With a beating heart, beating till he could hardly breathe, he stood in dumb hope before the mirror, on the following evening. Again the reflected room shone as through a purple vapour in the gathering twilight. Everything seemed waiting like himself for a coming splendour to glorify its poor earthliness with the presence of a heavenly joy. And just as the room vibrated with the strokes of the neighbouring church bell, announcing the hour of six, in glided the pale beauty, and again laid herself on the couch. Poor Cosmo nearly lost his senses with delight. She was there once more! Her eyes sought the corner where the skeleton had stood, and a faint gleam of satisfaction crossed her face, apparently at seeing it empty. She looked suffering still, but there was less of discomfort expressed in her countenance than there had been the night before. She took more notice of the things about her, and seemed to gaze with some curiosity on the strange apparatus standing here and there in her room. At length, however, drowsiness seemed to overtake her, and again she fell asleep. Resolved not to lose sight of her this time, Cosmo watched the sleeping form. Her slumber was so deep and absorbing, that a fascinating repose seemed to pass contagiously from her to him, as he gazed upon her; and he started as if awaking from a dream, when the lady moved, and, without opening her eyes, rose, and passed from the room with the gait of a somnambulist.

Cosmo was now in a state of extravagant delight. Most men have a secret treasure somewhere. The miser has his golden hoard; the virtuoso his pet ring; the student his rare book; the poet his favourite haunt; the lover his secret drawer; but Cosmo had a mirror with a lovely lady in it. And now that he knew by the skeleton, that she was affected by the things around her, he had a new object in life: he would turn the bare chamber in the mirror into a room such as no lady need disdain to call her own. This he could effect only by furnishing and adorning his. And Cosmo was poor. Yet he possessed accomplishments that could be turned to account; although, hitherto, he had preferred living on his slender allowance, to increasing his means by what his pride considered unworthy of his rank. He was the best swordsman in the University; and now he offered to give lessons in fencing and similar exercises, to such as chose to pay him well for the trouble. His

proposal was heard with surprise by the students; but it was eagerly accepted by many; and soon his instructions were not confined to the richer students, but were anxiously sought by many of the young nobility of Prague and its neighbourhood. So that very soon he had a good deal of money at his command. The first thing he did was to remove his apparatus and oddities into a closet in the room. Then he placed his bed and a few other necessaries on each side of the hearth, and parted them from the rest of the room by two screens of Indian fabric. Then he put an elegant couch for the lady to lie upon, in the corner where his bed had formerly stood; and, by degrees, every day adding some article of luxury, converted it, at length, into a rich boudoir.

Every night, about the same time, the lady entered. The first time she saw the new couch, she started with a half-smile; then her face grew very sad, the tears came to her eyes, and she laid herself upon the couch, and pressed her face into the silken cushions, as if to hide from everything. She took notice of each addition and each change as the work proceeded; and a look of acknowledgment, as if she knew that some one was ministering to her, and was grateful for it, mingled with the constant look of suffering. At length, after she had lain down as usual one evening, her eyes fell upon some paintings with which Cosmo had just finished adorning the walls. She rose, and to his great delight, walked across the room, and proceeded to examine them carefully, testifying much pleasure in her looks as she did so. But again the sorrowful, tearful expression returned, and again she buried her face in the pillows of her couch. Gradually, however, her countenance had grown more composed; much of the suffering manifest on her first appearance had vanished, and a kind of quiet, hopeful expression had taken its place; which, however, frequently gave way to an anxious, troubled look, mingled with something of sympathetic pity.

Meantime, how fared Cosmo? As might be expected in one of his temperament, his interest had blossomed into love, and his love – shall I call it *ripened*, or – *withered* into passion? But, alas! he loved a shadow. He could not come near her, could not speak to her, could not hear a sound from those sweet lips, to which his longing eyes would cling like bees to their honey-founts. Ever and anon, he sang to himself:

‘I shall die for love of the maiden;’

and ever he looked again, and died not, though his heart seemed ready to break with intensity of life and longing. And the more he did for her, the more he loved her; and he hoped that, although she never appeared to see him, yet she was pleased to think that one unknown would give his life to her. He tried to comfort himself over his separation from her, by thinking that perhaps some day she would see him and make signs to him, and that would satisfy him; 'for', thought he, 'is not this all that a loving soul can do to enter into communion with another? Nay, how many who love, never come nearer than to behold each other as in a mirror; seem to know and yet never know the inward life; never enter the other soul; and part at last, with but the vaguest notion of the universe on the borders of which they have been hovering for years? If I could but speak to her, and knew that she heard me, I should be satisfied.' Once he contemplated painting a picture on the wall, which should, of necessity, convey to the lady a thought of himself; but, though he had some skill with the pencil, he found his hand tremble so much when he began the attempt, that he was forced to give it up.

One evening, as he stood gazing on his treasure, he thought he saw a faint expression of self-consciousness on her countenance, as if she surmised that passionate eyes were fixed upon her. This grew; till at last the red blood rose over her neck, and cheek, and brow. Cosmo's longing to approach her became almost delirious. This night she was dressed in an evening costume, resplendent with diamonds. This could add nothing to her beauty, but it presented it in a new aspect; enabled her loveliness to make a new manifestation of itself in a new embodiment. For essential beauty is infinite; and, as the soul of Nature needs an endless succession of varied forms to embody her loveliness, countless faces of beauty springing forth, not any two the same, at every one of her heart-throbs; so the individual form needs an infinite change of its environments, to enable it to uncover all the phases of its loveliness. Diamonds glittered from amidst her hair, half-hidden in its luxuriance, like stars through dark rain-clouds; and the bracelets on her white arms flashed all the colours of a rainbow of lightnings, as she lifted her snowy hands to cover her burning face. But her beauty shone down all its adornment. 'If I might have but one of her feet to kiss,' thought Cosmo, 'I should be content.' Alas! he deceived himself, for passion is never content. Nor did he know that there are *two* ways out of her

enchanted house. But, suddenly, as if the pang had been driven into his heart from without, revealing itself first in pain, and afterwards in definite form, the thought darted into his mind, ‘She has a lover somewhere. Remembered words of his bring the colour on her face now. I am nowhere to her. She lives in another world all day, and all night, after she leaves me. Why does she come and make me love her, till I, a strong man, am too faint to look upon her more?’ He looked again, and her face was pale as a lily. A sorrowful compassion seemed to rebuke the glitter of the restless jewels, and the slow tears rose in her eyes. She left her room sooner this evening than was her wont. Cosmo remained alone, with a feeling as if his bosom had been suddenly left empty and hollow, and the weight of the whole world was crushing in its walls. The next evening, for the first time since she began to come, she came not.

And now Cosmo was in wretched plight. Since the thought of a rival had occurred to him, he could not rest for a moment. More than ever he longed to see the lady face to face. He persuaded himself that if he but knew the worst he would be satisfied; for then he could abandon Prague, and find that relief in constant motion, which is the hope of all active minds when invaded by distress. Meantime he waited with unspeakable anxiety for the next night, hoping she would return; but she did not appear. And now he fell really ill. Rallied by his fellow-students on his wretched looks, he ceased to attend the lectures. His engagements were neglected. He cared for nothing. The sky, with the great sun in it, was to him a heartless, burning desert. The men and women in the streets were mere puppets, without motives in themselves, or interest to him. He saw them all as on the ever-changing field of a *camera obscura*. She – she alone and altogether – was his universe, his well of life, his incarnate good. For six evenings she came not. Let his absorbing passion, and the slow fever that was consuming his brain, be his excuse for the resolution which he had taken and begun to execute, before that time had expired.

Reasoning with himself, that it must be by some enchantment connected with the mirror, that the form of the lady was to be seen in it, he determined to attempt to turn to account what he had hitherto studied principally from curiosity. ‘For,’ said he to himself, ‘if a spell can force her presence in that glass (and she came unwillingly at first), may not a stronger spell, such as I know, especially with the aid of her half-presence in the mirror, if ever she

appears again, compel her living form to come to me here? If I do her wrong, let love be my excuse. I want only to know my doom from her own lips.' He never doubted, all the time, that she was a real earthly woman; or, rather, that there was a woman, who, somehow or other, threw this reflection of her form into the magic mirror.

He opened his secret drawer, took out his books of magic, lighted his lamp, and read and made notes from midnight till three in the morning, for three successive nights. Then he replaced his books; and the next night went out in quest of the materials necessary for the conjuration. These were not easy to find; for, in love-charms and all incantations of this nature, ingredients are employed scarcely fit to be mentioned, and for the thought even of which, in connection with her, he could only excuse himself on the score of his bitter need. At length he succeeded in procuring all he required; and on the seventh evening from that on which she had last appeared, he found himself prepared for the exercise of unlawful and tyrannical power.

He cleared the centre of the room; stooped and drew a circle of red on the floor, around the spot where he stood; wrote in the four quarters mystical signs, and numbers which were all powers of seven or nine; examined the whole ring carefully, to see that no smallest break had occurred in the circumference; and then rose from his bending posture. As he rose, the church clock struck seven; and, just as she had appeared the first time, reluctant, slow, and stately, glided in the lady. Cosmo trembled; and when, turning, she revealed a countenance worn and wan, as with sickness or inward trouble, he grew faint, and felt as if he dared not proceed. But as he gazed on the face and form, which now possessed his whole soul, to the exclusion of all other joys and griefs, the longing to speak to her, to know that she heard him, to hear from her one word in return, became so unendurable, that he suddenly and hastily resumed his preparations. Stepping carefully from the circle, he put a small brazier into its centre. He then set fire to its contents of charcoal, and while it burned up, opened his window and seated himself, waiting, beside it.

It was a sultry evening. The air was full of thunder. A sense of luxurious depression filled the brain. The sky seemed to have grown heavy, and to compress the air beneath it. A kind of purplish tinge pervaded the atmosphere, and through the open window came the scents of the distant fields, which all the vapours of the city could not quench. Soon the charcoal

glowed. Cosmo sprinkled upon it the incense and other substances which he had compounded, and, stepping within the circle, turned his face from the brazier and towards the mirror. Then, fixing his eyes upon the face of the lady, he began with a trembling voice to repeat a powerful incantation. He had not gone far, before the lady grew pale; and then, like a returning wave, the blood washed all its banks with its crimson tide, and she hid her face in her hands. Then he passed to a conjuration stronger yet. The lady rose and walked uneasily to and fro in her room. Another spell; and she seemed seeking with her eyes for some object on which they wished to rest. At length it seemed as if she suddenly espied him; for her eyes fixed themselves full and wide upon his, and she drew gradually, and somewhat unwillingly, close to her side of the mirror, just as if his eyes had fascinated her. Cosmo had never seen her so near before. Now at least, eyes met eyes; but he could not quite understand the expression of hers. They were full of tender entreaty, but there was something more that he could not interpret. Though his heart seemed to labour in his throat, he would allow no delight or agitation to turn him from his task. Looking still in her face, he passed on to the mightiest charm he knew. Suddenly the lady turned and walked out of the door of her reflected chamber. A moment after, she entered his room with veritable presence; and, forgetting all his precautions, he sprang from the charmed circle, and knelt before her. There she stood, the living lady of his passionate visions, alone beside him, in a thundery twilight, and the glow of a magic fire.

‘Why,’ said the lady, with a trembling voice, ‘didst thou bring a poor maiden through the rainy streets alone?’

‘Because I am dying for love of thee; but I only brought thee from the mirror there.’

‘Ah, the mirror!’ and she looked up at it, and shuddered. ‘Alas! I am but a slave, while that mirror exists. But do not think it was the power of thy spells that drew me; it was thy longing desire to see me, that beat at the door of my heart, till I was forced to yield.’

‘Canst thou love me then?’ said Cosmo, in a voice calm as death, but almost inarticulate with emotion.

‘I do not know,’ she replied sadly; ‘that I cannot tell, so long as I am bewildered with enchantments. It were indeed a joy too great, to lay my

head on thy bosom and weep to death; for I think thou lovest me, though I do not know; – but—'

Cosmo rose from his knees.

'I love thee as – nay, I know not what – for since I have loved thee, there is nothing else.'

He seized her hand: she withdrew it.

'No, better not; I am in thy power, and therefore I may not.'

She burst into tears, and, kneeling before him in her turn, said –

'Cosmo, if thou lovest me, set me free, even from thyself: break the mirror.'

'And shall I see thyself instead?'

'That I cannot tell. I will not deceive thee; we may never meet again.'

A fierce struggle arose in Cosmo's bosom. Now she was in his power. She did not dislike him at least; and he could see her when he would. To break the mirror would be to destroy his very life, to banish out of his universe the only glory it possessed. The whole world would be but a prison, if he annihilated the one window that looked into the paradise of love. Not yet pure in love, he hesitated.

With a wail of sorrow, the lady rose to her feet. 'Ah! he loves me not; he loves me not even as I love him; and alas! I care more for his love than even for the freedom I ask.'

'I will not wait to be willing,' cried Cosmo; and sprang to the corner where the great sword stood.

Meantime it had grown very dark; only the embers cast a red glow through the room. He seized the sword by the steel scabbard, and stood before the mirror; but as he heaved a great blow at it with the heavy pommel, the blade slipped halfway out of the scabbard, and the pommel struck the wall above the mirror. At that moment, a terrible clap of thunder seemed to burst in the very room beside them; and ere Cosmo could repeat the blow, he fell senseless on the hearth. When he came to himself, he found that the lady and the mirror had both disappeared. He was seized with a brain fever, which kept him to his couch for weeks.

When he recovered his reason, he began to think what could have become of the mirror. For the lady, he hoped she had found her way back as she came; but as the mirror involved her fate with its own, he was more immediately anxious about that. He could not think she had carried it away.

It was much too heavy, even if it had not been too firmly fixed in the wall, for her to remove it. Then again, he remembered the thunder; which made him believe that it was not the lightning, but some other blow that had struck him down. He concluded that, either by supernatural agency, he having exposed himself to the vengeance of the demons in leaving the circle of safety, or in some other mode, the mirror had probably found its way back to its former owner; and, horrible to think of, might have been by this time once more disposed of, delivering up the lady into the power of another man; who, if he used his power no worse than he himself had done, might yet give Cosmo abundant cause to curse the selfish indecision which prevented him from shattering the mirror at once. Indeed, to think that she whom he loved, and who had prayed to him for freedom, should be still at the mercy, in some degree, of the possessor of the mirror, and was at least exposed to his constant observation, was in itself enough to madden a chary lover.

Anxiety to be well retarded his recovery; but at length he was able to creep abroad. He first made his way to the old broker's, pretending to be in search of something else. A laughing sneer on the creature's face convinced him that he knew all about it; but he could not see it amongst his furniture, or get any information out of him as to what had become of it. He expressed the utmost surprise at hearing it had been stolen; a surprise which Cosmo saw at once to be counterfeited; while, at the same time, he fancied that the old wretch was not at all anxious to have it mistaken for genuine. Full of distress, which he concealed as well as he could, he made many searches, but with no avail. Of course he could ask no questions; but he kept his ears awake for any remotest hint that might set him in a direction of search. He never went out without a short heavy hammer of steel about him, that he might shatter the mirror the moment he was made happy by the sight of his lost treasure, if ever that blessed moment should arrive. Whether he should see the lady again, was now a thought altogether secondary, and postponed to the achievement of her freedom. He wandered here and there, like an anxious ghost, pale and haggard; gnawed ever at the heart by the thought of what she might be suffering – all from his fault.

One night, he mingled with a crowd that filled the rooms of one of the most distinguished mansions in the city; for he accepted every invitation, that he might lose no chance, however poor, of obtaining some information

that might expedite his discovery. Here he wandered about, listening to every stray word that he could catch, in the hope of a revelation. As he approached some ladies who were talking quietly in a corner, one said to another: ‘Have you heard of the strange illness of the Princess von Hohenweiss?’

‘Yes; she has been ill for more than a year now. It is very sad for so fine a creature to have such a terrible malady. She was better for some weeks lately, but within the last few days, the same attacks have returned, apparently accompanied with more suffering than ever. It is altogether an inexplicable story.’

‘Is there a story connected with her illness?’

‘I have only heard imperfect reports of it; but it is said that she gave offence some eighteen months ago to an old woman who had held an office of trust in the family, and who, after some incoherent threats, disappeared. This peculiar affection followed soon after. But the strangest part of the story is its association with the loss of an antique mirror, which stood in her dressing-room, and of which she constantly made use.’

Here the speaker’s voice sank to a whisper; and Cosmo, although his very soul sat listening in his ears, could hear no more. He trembled too much to dare to address the ladies, even if it had been advisable to expose himself to their curiosity. The name of the Princess was well known to him, but he had never seen her; except indeed it was she, which now he hardly doubted, who had knelt before him on that dreadful night. Fearful of attracting attention, for, from the weak state of his health, he could not recover an appearance of calmness, he made his way to the open air, and reached his lodgings; glad in this, that he at least knew where she lived, although he never dreamed of approaching her openly, even if he should be happy enough to free her from her hateful bondage. He hoped, too, that as he had unexpectedly learned so much, the other and far more important part might be revealed to him ere long.

‘Have you seen Steinwald lately?’

‘No, I have not seen him for some time. He is almost a match for me at the rapier, and I suppose he thinks he needs no more lessons.’

‘I wonder what has become of him. I want to see him very much. Let me see: the last time I saw him, he was coming out of that old broker’s den, to which, if you remember, you accompanied me once, to look at some armour. That is fully three weeks ago.’

This hint was enough for Cosmo. Von Steinwald was a man of influence in the court, well known for his reckless habits and fierce passions. The very possibility that the mirror should be in his possession was hell itself to Cosmo. But violent or hasty measures of any sort were most unlikely to succeed. All that he wanted was an opportunity of breaking the fatal glass; and to obtain this, he must bide his time. He revolved many plans in his mind, but without being able to fix upon any.

At length, one evening, as he was passing the house of Von Steinwald, he saw the windows more than usually brilliant. He watched for a while; and seeing that company began to arrive, hastened home, and dressed as richly as he could, in the hope of mingling with the guests unquestioned; in effecting which, there could be no difficulty for a man of his carriage.

In a lofty, silent chamber, in another part of the city, lay a form more like marble than a living woman. The loveliness of death seemed frozen upon her face, for her lips were rigid, and her eyelids closed. Her long white hands were crossed over her breast, and no breathing disturbed their repose. Beside the dead, men speak in whispers as if the deepest rest of all could be broken by the sound of a living voice. Just so, though the soul was evidently beyond the reach of all intimations from the senses, the two ladies, who sat beside her, spoke in the gentlest tones of subdued sorrow.

‘She has lain so for an hour.’

‘This cannot last long, I fear.’

‘How much thinner she has grown within the last few weeks! If she would only speak, and explain what she suffers, it would be better for her. I think she has visions in her trances, but nothing can induce her to refer to them when she is awake.’

‘Does she ever speak in these trances?’

‘I have never heard her; but they say she walks sometimes, and once put the whole household in a terrible fright by disappearing for a whole hour,

and returning drenched with rain, and almost dead with exhaustion and fright. But even then she would give no account of what had happened.'

A scarce audible murmur from the yet motionless lips of the lady here startled her attendants. After several ineffectual attempts at articulation, the word '*Cosmo!*' burst from her. Then she lay still as before; but only for a moment. With a wild cry, she sprang from the couch erect on the floor, flung her arms above her head, with clasped and straining hands, and, her wide eyes flashing with light, called aloud, with a voice exultant as that of a spirit bursting from a sepulchre, 'I am free! I am free! I thank thee!' Then she flung herself on the couch, and sobbed; then rose, and paced wildly up and down the room, with gestures of mingled delight and anxiety. Then turning to her motionless attendants – 'Quick, Lisa, my cloak and hood!' Then lower – 'I must go to him. Make haste, Lisa! You may come with me, if you will.'

In another moment they were in the street, hurrying along towards one of the bridges over the Moldau. The moon was near the zenith, and the streets were almost empty. The Princess soon outstripped her attendant, and was half-way over the bridge, before the other reached it.

'Are you free, lady? The mirror is broken: are you free?'

The words were spoken close beside her, as she hurried on. She turned; and there, leaning on the parapet in a recess of the bridge, stood Cosmo, in a splendid dress, but with a white and quivering face.

'Cosmo! – I am free – and thy servant for ever. I was coming to you now.'

'And I to you, for Death made me bold; but I could get no further. Have I atoned at all? Do I love you a little – truly?'

'Ah, I know now that you love me, my Cosmo; but what do you say about death?'

He did not reply. His hand was pressed against his side. She looked more closely: the blood was welling from between the fingers. She flung her arms around him with a faint bitter wail.

When Lisa came up, she found her mistress kneeling above a wan dead face, which smiled on in the spectral moonbeams.

And now I will say no more about these wondrous volumes; though I could tell many a tale out of them, and could, perhaps, vaguely represent some entrancing thoughts of a deeper kind which I found within them. From many a sultry noon till twilight, did I sit in that grand hall, buried and risen again in these old books. And I trust I have carried away in my soul some of the exhalations of their undying leaves. In after hours of deserved or needful sorrow, portions of what I read there have often come to me again, with an unexpected comforting; which was not fruitless, even though the comfort might seem in itself groundless and vain.

CHAPTER 14

Your gallery
Have we pass'd through, not without much content
In many singularities; but we saw not
That which my daughter came to look upon,
The statue of her mother.

Winter's Tale

It seemed to me strange, that all this time I had heard no music in the fairy palace. I was convinced there must be music in it, but that my sense was as yet too gross to receive the influence of those mysterious motions that beget sound. Sometimes I felt sure, from the way the few figures of which I got such transitory glimpses passed me, or glided into vacancy before me, that they were moving to the law of music; and, in fact, several times I fancied for a moment that I heard a few wondrous tones coming I knew not whence. But they did not last long enough to convince me that I had heard them with the bodily sense. Such as they were, however, they took strange liberties with me, causing me to burst suddenly into tears, of which there was no presence to make me ashamed, or casting me into a kind of trance of speechless delight, which, passing as suddenly, left me faint and longing for more.

Now, on an evening, before I had been a week in the palace, I was wandering through one lighted arcade and corridor after another. At length I arrived, through a door that closed behind me, in another vast hall of the palace. It was filled with a subdued crimson light; by which I saw that slender pillars of black, built close to walls of white marble, rose to a great height, and then, dividing into innumerable divergent arches, supported a roof, like the walls, of white marble, upon which the arches intersected intricately, forming a fretting of black upon the white, like the network of a skeleton-leaf. The floor was black. Between several pairs of the pillars upon every side, the place of the wall behind was occupied by a crimson curtain

of thick silk, hanging in heavy and rich folds. Behind each of these curtains burned a powerful light, and these were the sources of the glow that filled the hall. A peculiar delicious odour pervaded the place. As soon as I entered, the old inspiration seemed to return to me, for I felt a strong impulse to sing; or rather, it seemed as if some one else was singing a song in my soul, which wanted to come forth at my lips, imbodied in my breath. But I kept silence; and feeling somewhat overcome by the red light and the perfume, as well as by the emotion within me, and seeing at one end of the hall a great crimson chair, more like a throne than a chair, beside a table of white marble, I went to it, and, throwing myself in it, gave myself up to a succession of images of bewildering beauty, which passed before my inward eye, in a long and occasionally crowded train. Here I sat for hours, I suppose; till, returning somewhat to myself, I saw that the red light had paled away, and felt a cool gentle breath gliding over my forehead. I rose and left the hall with unsteady steps, finding my way with some difficulty to my own chamber, and faintly remembering, as I went, that only in the marble cave, before I found the sleeping statue, had I ever had a similar experience.

After this, I repaired every morning to the same hall; where I sometimes sat in the chair, and dreamed deliciously, and sometimes walked up and down over the black floor. Sometimes I acted within myself a whole drama, during one of these perambulations; sometimes walked deliberately through the whole epic of a tale; sometimes ventured to sing a song, though with a shrinking fear of I knew not what. I was astonished at the beauty of my own voice as it rang through the place, or rather crept undulating, like a serpent of sound, along the walls and roof of this superb music-hall. Entrancing verses arose within me as of their own accord, chanting themselves to their own melodies, and requiring no addition of music to satisfy the inward sense. But, ever in the pauses of these, when the singing mood was upon me, I seemed to hear something like the distant sound of multitudes of dancers, and felt as if it was the unheard music, moving their rhythmic motion, that within me blossomed in verse and song. I felt, too, that could I but see the dance, I should, from the harmony of complicated movements, not of the dancers in relation to each other merely, but of each dancer individually in the manifested plastic power that moved the consenting

harmonious form, understand the whole of the music on the billows of which they floated and swung.

At length, one night, suddenly, when this feeling of dancing came upon me, I bethought me of lifting one of the crimson curtains, and looking if, perchance, behind it there might not be hid some other mystery, which might at least remove a step further the bewilderment of the present one. Nor was I altogether disappointed. I walked to one of the magnificent draperies, lifted a corner, and peeped in. There, burned a great, crimson, globe-shaped light, high in the cubical centre of another hall, which might be larger or less than that in which I stood, for its dimensions were not easily perceived, seeing that floor and roof and walls were entirely of black marble. The roof was supported by the same arrangement of pillars radiating in arches, as that of the first hall; only, here, the pillars and arches were of dark red. But what absorbed my delighted gaze, was an innumerable assembly of white marble statues, of every form, and in multitudinous posture, filling the hall throughout. These stood, in the ruddy glow of the great lamp, upon pedestals of jet black. Around the lamp shone in golden letters, plainly legible from where I stood, the two words –

TOUCH NOT!

There was in all this, however, no solution to the sound of dancing; and now I was aware that the influence on my mind had ceased. I did not go in that evening, for I was weary and faint, but I hoarded up the expectation of entering, as of a great coming joy.

Next night I walked, as on the preceding, through the hall. My mind was filled with pictures and songs, and therewith so much absorbed, that I did not for some time think of looking within the curtain I had last night lifted. When the thought of doing so occurred to me first, I happened to be within a few yards of it. I became conscious at the same moment, that the sound of dancing had been for some time in my ears. I approached the curtain quickly, and, lifting it, entered the black hall. Everything was still as death. I should have concluded that the sound must have proceeded from some other more distant quarter, which conclusion its faintness would, in ordinary circumstances, have necessitated from the first; but there was a something about the statues that caused me still to remain in doubt. As I said, each

stood perfectly still upon its black pedestal; but there was about every one a certain air, not of motion, but as if it had just ceased from movement; as if the rest were not altogether of the marbly stillness of thousands of years. It was as if the peculiar atmosphere of each had yet a kind of invisible tremulousness; as if its agitated wavelets had not yet subsided into a perfect calm. I had the suspicion that they had anticipated my appearance, and had sprung, each, from the living joy of the dance, to the death-silence and blackness of its isolated pedestal, just before I entered. I walked across the central hall to the curtain opposite the one I had lifted, and, entering there, found all the appearances similar; only that the statues were different, and differently grouped. Neither did they produce on my mind that impression – of motion just expired, which I had experienced from the others. I found that behind every one of the crimson curtains was a similar hall, similarly lighted, and similarly occupied.

The next night, I did not allow my thoughts to be absorbed as before with inward images, but crept stealthily along to the furthest curtain in the hall, from behind which, likewise, I had formerly seemed to hear the sound of dancing. I drew aside its edge as suddenly as I could, and, looking in, saw that the utmost stillness pervaded the vast place. I walked in, and passed through it to the other end. There I found that it communicated with a circular corridor, divided from it only by two rows of red columns. This corridor, which was black, with red niches holding statues, ran entirely about the statue-halls, forming a communication between the further ends of them all; further, that is, as regards the central hall of white, whence they all diverged like radii, finding their circumference in the corridor. Round this corridor I now went, entering all the halls, of which there were twelve, and finding them all similarly constructed, but filled with quite various statues, of what seemed both ancient and modern sculpture. After I had simply walked through them, I found myself sufficiently tired to long for rest, and went to my own room.

In the night I dreamed that, walking close by one of the curtains, I was suddenly seized with the desire to enter, and darted in. This time I was too quick for them. All the statues were in motion, statues no longer, but men and women – all shapes of beauty that ever sprang from the brain of the sculptor, mingled in the convolutions of a complicated dance. Passing through them to the further end, I almost started from my sleep on

beholding, not taking part in the dance with the others, nor seemingly endued with life like them, but standing in marble coldness and rigidity upon a black pedestal in the extreme left corner – my lady of the cave; the marble beauty who sprang from her tomb or her cradle at the call of my songs. While I gazed in speechless astonishment and admiration, a dark shadow, descending from above like the curtain of a stage, gradually hid her entirely from my view. I felt with a shudder that this shadow was perchance my missing demon, whom I had not seen for days. I awoke with a stifled cry.

Of course, the next evening I began my journey through the halls (for I knew not to which my dream had carried me), in the hope of proving the dream to be a true one, by discovering my marble beauty upon her black pedestal. At length, on reaching the tenth hall, I thought I recognised some of the forms I had seen dancing in my dream; and to my bewilderment, when I arrived at the extreme corner on the left, there stood, the only one I had yet seen, a vacant pedestal. It was exactly in the position occupied, in my dream, by the pedestal on which the white lady stood. Hope beat violently in my heart.

'Now,' said I to myself, 'if yet another part of the dream would but come true, and I should succeed in surprising these forms in their nightly dance; it might be the rest would follow, and I should see on the pedestal my marble queen. Then surely if my songs sufficed to give her life before, when she lay in the bonds of alabaster, much more would they be sufficient then to give her volition and motion, when she alone of assembled crowds of marble forms, would be standing rigid and cold.'

But the difficulty was, to surprise the dancers. I had found that a premeditated attempt at surprise, though executed with the utmost care and rapidity, was of no avail. And, in my dream, it was effected by a sudden thought suddenly executed. I saw, therefore, that there was no plan of operation offering any probability of success, but this: to allow my mind to be occupied with other thoughts, as I wandered around the great centre-hall; and so wait till the impulse to enter one of the others should happen to arise in me just at the moment when I was close to one of the crimson curtains. For I hoped that if I entered any one of the twelve halls at the right moment, that would as it were give me the right of entrance to all the others, seeing they all had communication behind. I would not diminish the hope of the

right chance, by supposing it necessary that the desire to enter should awake within me, precisely when I was close to the curtains of the tenth hall.

At first, the impulses to see recurred so continually, in spite of the crowded imagery that kept passing through my mind, that they formed too nearly a continuous chain, for the hope that any one of them would succeed as a surprise. But as I persisted in banishing them, they recurred less and less often; and after two or three, at considerable intervals, had come when the spot where I happened to be was unsuitable, the hope strengthened, that soon one might arise just at the right moment; namely, when, in walking round the hall, I should be close to one of the curtains.

At length the right moment and the impulse coincided. I darted into the ninth hall. It was full of the most exquisite moving forms. The whole space wavered and swam with the involutions of an intricate dance. It seemed to break suddenly as I entered, and all made one or two bounds towards their pedestals; but, apparently on finding that they were thoroughly overtaken, they returned to their employment (for it seemed with them earnest enough to be called such) without further heeding me. Somewhat impeded by the floating crowd, I made what haste I could towards the bottom of the hall; whence, entering the corridor, I turned towards the tenth. I soon arrived at the corner I wanted to reach, for the corridor was comparatively empty; but, although the dancers here, after a little confusion, altogether disregarded my presence, I was dismayed at beholding, even yet, a vacant pedestal. But I had a conviction that she was near me. And as I looked at the pedestal, I thought I saw upon it, vaguely revealed as if through overlapping folds of drapery, the indistinct outlines of white feet. Yet there was no sign of drapery or concealing shadow whatever. But I remembered the descending shadow in my dream. And I hoped still in the power of my songs; thinking that what could dispel alabaster, might likewise be capable of dispelling what concealed my beauty now, even if it were the demon whose darkness had overshadowed all my life.

CHAPTER 15

Alexander: When will you finish Campaspe?
Apelles: Never finish: for always in absolute beauty there is somewhat above art.
LYLY'S *Campaspe*

And now, what song should I sing to unveil my Isis, if indeed she was present unseen? I hurried away to the white hall of Phantasy, heedless of the innumerable forms of beauty that crowded my way: these might cross my eyes, but the unseen filled my brain. I wandered long, up and down the silent space: no songs came. My soul was not still enough for songs. Only in the silence and darkness of the soul's night, do those stars of the inward firmament sink to its lower surface from the singing realms beyond, and shine upon the conscious spirit. Here all effort was unavailing. If they came not, they could not be found.

Next night, it was just the same. I walked through the red glimmer of the silent hall; but lonely as there I walked, as lonely trod my soul up and down the halls of the brain. At last I entered one of the statue-halls. The dance had just commenced, and I was delighted to find that I was free of their assembly. I walked on till I came to the sacred corner. There I found the pedestal just as I had left it, with the faint glimmer as of white feet still resting on the dead black. As soon as I saw it, I seemed to feel a presence which longed to become visible; and, as it were, called to me to gift it with self-manifestation, that it might shine on me. The power of song came to me. But the moment my voice, though I sang low and soft, stirred the air of the hall, the dancers started; the quick interweaving crowd shook, lost its form, divided; each figure sprang to its pedestal, and stood, a self-evolving life no more, but a rigid, life-like, marble shape, with the whole form composed into the expression of a single state or act. Silence rolled like a spiritual thunder through the grand space. My song had ceased, scared at its own influences. But I saw in the hand of one of the statues close by me, a

harp whose chords yet quivered. I remembered that as she bounded past me, her harp had brushed against my arm; so the spell of the marble had not infolded it. I sprang to her, and with a gesture of entreaty, laid my hand on the harp. The marble hand, probably from its contact with the uncharmed harp, had strength enough to relax its hold, and yield the harp to me. No other motion indicated life.

Instinctively I struck the chords and sang. And not to break upon the record of my song, I mention here, that as I sang the first four lines, the loveliest feet became clear upon the black pedestal; and ever as I sang, it was as if a veil were being lifted up from before the form, but an invisible veil, so that the statue appeared to grow before me, not so much by evolution, as by infinitesimal degrees of added height. And, while I sang, I did not feel that I stood by a statue, as indeed it appeared to be, but that a real woman-soul was revealing itself by successive stages of imbodiment, and consequent manifestation and expression.

Feet of beauty, firmly planting
  Arches white on rosy heel!
Whence the life-spring, throbbing, panting,
  Pulses upward to reveal!
Fairest things know least despising;
  Foot and earth meet tenderly:
’Tis the woman, resting, rising
  Upward to sublimity.

Rise the limbs, sedately sloping,
  Strong and gentle, full and free;
Soft and slow, like certain hoping,
  Drawing nigh the broad firm knee.
Up to speech! As up to roses
  Pants the life from leaf to flower,
So each blending change discloses,
  Nearer still, expression’s power.

Lo! fair sweeps, white surges, twining
  Up and outward fearlessly!

Temple columns, close combining,
Lift a holy mystery.
Heart of mine! what strange surprises
Mount aloft on such a stair!
Some great vision upward rises,
Curving, bending, floating fair.

Bands and sweeps, and hill and hollow
Lead my fascinated eye;
Some apocalypse will follow,
Some new word of deity.
Zoned unseen, and outward swelling,
With new thoughts and wonders rife,
Queenly majesty foretelling,
See the expanding house of life!

Sudden heaving, unforbidden
Sighs eternal, still the same –
Mounts of snow have summits hidden
In the mists of uttered flame.
But the spirit, dawning nearly,
Finds no speech for earnest pain;
Finds a soundless sighing merely –
Builds its stairs, and mounts again.

Heart, the queen, with secret hoping,
Sendeth out her waiting pair;
Hands, blind hands, half blindly groping,
Half inclasping visions rare;
And the great arms, heartways bending;
Might of Beauty, drawing home;
There returning, and re-blending,
Where from roots of love they roam.

Build thy slopes of radiance beamy,
Spirit, fair with womanhood!

Tower thy precipice, white-gleamy,
Climb unto the hour of good.
Dumb space will be rent asunder,
Now the shining column stands
Ready to be crowned with wonder
By the builder's joyous hands.

All the lines abroad are spreading,
Like a fountain's failing race,
Lo, the chin, first feature, treading,
Airy foot to rest the face!
Speech is nigh; oh, see the blushing
Sweet approach of lip and breath!
Round the mouth dim silence, hushing,
Waits to die ecstatic death.

Span across in treble curving,
Bow of promise, upper lip!
Set them free, with gracious swerving;
Let the wing-words float and dip.
Dumb art thou? O Love immortal,
More than words thy speech must be;
Childless yet the tender portal
Of the home of melody.

Now the nostrils open fearless,
Proud in calm unconsciousness.
Sure it must be something peerless
That the great Pan would express!
Deepens, crowds some meaning tender,
In the pure, dear lady-face.
Lo, a blinding burst of splendour! –
'Tis the free soul's issuing grace.

Two calm lakes of molten glory
Circling round unfathomed deeps!

Lightning-flashes, transitory,
Cross the gulfs where darkness sleeps.
This the gate, at last, of gladness,
To the outward-striving *me*:
In a rain of light and sadness,
Out its loves and longings flee!

With a presence I am smitten
Dumb, with a foreknown surprise;
Presence greater yet than written
Even in the glorious eyes.
Through the gulfs, with inward gazes,
I may look till I am lost;
Wandering deep in spirit-mazes,
In a sea without a coast.

Windows open to the glorious!
Time and space, oh, far beyond!
Woman, ah! thou art victorious,
And I perish, overfond.
Springs aloft the yet Unspoken
In the forehead's endless grace,
Full of silences unbroken;
Infinite, unfeatured face.

Domes above, the mount of wonder;
Height and hollow wrapt in night;
Hiding in its caverns under
Woman-nations in their might.
Passing forms, the highest Human
Faints away to the Divine:
Features none, of man or woman,
Can unveil the holiest shine.

Sideways, grooved porches only
Visible to passing eye,

Stand the silent, doorless, lonely
    Entrance-gates of melody.
But all sounds fly in as boldly,
    Groan and song, and kiss and cry,
At their galleries, lifted coldly,
    Darkly, ’twixt the earth and sky.

Beauty, thou art spent, thou knowest:
    So, in faint, half-glad despair,
From the summit thou o’erflowest
    In a fall of torrent hair;
Hiding what thou hast created
    In a half-transparent shroud:
Thus, with glory soft-abated,
    Shines the moon through vapoury cloud.

CHAPTER 16

Selbst der Styx, der neunfach sie umwindet,
Wehrt die Rückkehr Ceres Tochter nicht;
Nach dem Apfel greift sie, und es bindet
Ewig sie des Orkus Pflicht.

SCHILLER – *Das Ideal und das Leben*

Ev'n the Styx, which ninefold her infoldeth,
Hems not Ceres' daughter in its flow;
But she grasps the apple – ever holdeth
Her, sad Orcus, down below.

Ever as I sang, the veil was uplifted; ever as I sang, the signs of life grew; till, when the eyes dawned upon me, it was with that sunrise of splendour which my feeble song attempted to re-imbody. The wonder is, that I was not altogether overcome, but was able to complete my song as the unseen veil continued to rise. This ability came solely from the state of mental elevation in which I found myself. Only because uplifted in song, was I able to endure the blaze of the dawn. But I cannot tell whether she looked more of statue or more of woman; she seemed removed into that region of phantasy where all is intensely vivid, but nothing clearly defined. At last, as I sang of her descending hair, the glow of soul faded away, like a dying sunset. A lamp within had been extinguished, and the house of life shone blank in a winter morn. She was a statue once more – but visible, and that was much gained. Yet the revulsion from hope and fruition was such, that, unable to restrain myself, I sprang to her, and, in defiance of the law of the place, flung my arms around her, as if I would tear her from the grasp of a visible Death, and lifted her from the pedestal down to my heart. But no sooner had her feet ceased to be in contact with the black pedestal, than she shuddered and trembled all over; then, writhing from my arms, before I could tighten their hold, she sprang into the corridor, with the reproachful cry, 'You should not have touched me!' darted behind one of the exterior pillars of the

circle, and disappeared. I followed almost as fast; but ere I could reach the pillar, the sound of a closing door, the saddest of all sounds sometimes, fell on my ear; and, arriving at the spot where she had vanished, I saw, lighted by a pale yellow lamp which hung above it, a heavy, rough door, altogether unlike any others I had seen in the palace; for they were all of ebony, or ivory, or covered with silver-plates, or of some odorous wood, and very ornate; whereas this seemed of old oak, with heavy nails and iron studs. Notwithstanding the precipitation of my pursuit, I could not help reading, in silver letters beneath the lamp: '*No one enters here without the leave of the Queen*.' But what was the Queen to me, when I followed my white lady? I dashed the door to the wall, and sprang through. Lo! I stood on a waste windy hill. Great stones like tombstones stood all about me. No door, no palace was to be seen. A white figure gleamed past me, wringing her hands, and crying, 'Ah! you should have sung to me; you should have sung to me!' and disappeared behind one of the stones. I followed. A cold gust of wind met me from behind the stone; and when I looked, I saw nothing but a great hole in the earth, into which I could find no way of entering. Had she fallen in? I could not tell. I must wait for the daylight. I sat down and wept, for there was no help.

CHAPTER 17

Anfangs woilt ’ich fast verzagen,
Und ich glaubt’ ich trüg’ es nie,
Und ich hab’ es doch getragen, –
Aber fragt mich nur nicht: wie?

HEINE

First, I thought, almost despairing,
This must crush my spirit now;
Yet I bore it, and am bearing –
Only do not ask me how.

When the daylight came, it brought the possibility of action, but with it little of consolation. With the first visible increase of light, I gazed into the chasm, but could not, for more than an hour, see sufficiently well to discover its nature. At last I saw it was almost a perpendicular opening, like a roughly excavated well, only very large. I could perceive no bottom; and it was not till the sun actually rose, that I discovered a sort of natural staircase, in many parts little more than suggested, which led round and round the gulf, descending spirally into its abyss. I saw at once that this was my path; and without a moment’s hesitation, glad to quit the sunlight, which stared at me most heartlessly, I commenced my tortuous descent. It was very difficult. In some parts I had to cling to the rocks like a bat. In one place, I dropped from the track down upon the next returning spire of the stair; which being broad in this particular portion, and standing out from the wall at right angles, received me upon my feet safe, though somewhat stupified by the shock. After descending a great way, I found the stair ended at a narrow opening which entered the rock horizontally. Into this I crept, and, having entered, had just room to turn round. I put my head out into the shaft by which I had come down, and surveyed the course of my descent. Looking up, I saw the stars; although the sun must by this time have been high in the heavens. Looking below, I saw that the sides of the shaft went

sheer down, smooth as glass; and far beneath me, I saw the reflection of the same stars I had seen in the heavens when I looked up. I turned again, and crept inwards some distance, when the passage widened, and I was at length able to stand and walk upright. Wider and loftier grew the way; new paths branched off on every side; great open halls appeared; till at last I found myself wandering on through an underground country, in which the sky was of rock, and instead of trees and flowers, there were only fantastic rocks and stones. And ever as I went, darker grew my thoughts, till at last I had no hope whatever of finding the white lady: I no longer called her to myself *my* white lady. Wherever a choice was necessary, I always chose the path which seemed to lead downwards.

At length I began to find that these regions were inhabited. From behind a rock a peal of harsh grating laughter, full of evil humour, rang through my ears, and, looking round, I saw a queer, goblin creature, with a great head and ridiculous features, just such as those described, in German histories and travels, as Kobolds. ‘What do you want with me?’ I said. He pointed at me with a long forefinger, very thick at the root, and sharpened to a point, and answered, ‘He! he! he! what do *you* want here?’ Then, changing his tone, he continued, with mock humility – ‘Honoured sir, vouchsafe to withdraw from thy slaves the lustre of thy august presence, for thy slaves cannot support its brightness.’ A second appeared, and struck in: ‘You are so big, you keep the sun from us. We can’t see for you, and we’re so cold.’ Thereupon arose, on all sides, the most terrific uproar of laughter, from voices like those of children in volume, but scrannel and harsh as those of decrepit age, though, unfortunately, without its weakness. The whole pandemonium of fairy devils, of all varieties of fantastic ugliness, both in form and feature, and of all sizes from one to four feet, seemed to have suddenly assembled about me. At length, after a great babble of talk among themselves, in a language unknown to me, and after seemingly endless gesticulation, consultation, elbow-nudging, and unmitigated peals of laughter, they formed into a circle about one of their number, who scrambled upon a stone, and, much to my surprise, and somewhat to my dismay, began to sing, in a voice corresponding in its nature to his talking one, from beginning to end, the song with which I had brought the light into the eyes of the white lady. He sang the same air too; and, all the time, maintained a face of mock entreaty and worship; accompanying the song

with the travestied gestures of one playing on the lute. The whole assembly kept silence, except at the close of every verse, when they roared, and danced, and shouted with laughter, and flung themselves on the ground, in real or pretended convulsions of delight. When he had finished, the singer threw himself from the top of the stone, turning heels over head several times in his descent; and when he did alight, it was on the top of his head, on which he hopped about, making the most grotesque gesticulations with his legs in the air. Inexpressible laughter followed, which broke up in a shower of tiny stones from innumerable hands. They could not materially injure me, although they cut me on the head and face. I attempted to run away, but they all rushed upon me, and, laying hold of every part that afforded a grasp, held me tight. Crowding about me like bees, they shouted an insect-swarm of exasperating speeches up into my face, among which the most frequently recurring were – 'You shan't have her; you shan't have her; he! he! he! She's for a better man; she's for a better man; how he'll kiss her! how he'll kiss her!'

The galvanic torrent of this battery of malevolence stung to life within me a spark of nobleness, and I said aloud, 'Well, if he is a better man, let him have her.'

They instantly let go their hold of me, and fell back a step or two, with a whole broadside of grunts and humphs, as of unexpected and disappointed approbation. I made a step or two forward, and a lane was instantly opened for me through the midst of the grinning little antics, who bowed most politely to me on every side as I passed. After I had gone a few yards, I looked back, and saw them all standing quite still, looking after me, like a great school of boys; till suddenly one turned round, and with a loud whoop, rushed into the midst of the others. In an instant, the whole was one writhing and tumbling heap of contortion, reminding me of the live pyramids of intertwined snakes of which travellers make report. As soon as one was worked out of the mass, he bounded off a few paces, and then, with a somerset and a run, threw himself gyrating into the air, and descended with all his weight on the summit of the heaving and struggling chaos of fantastic figures. I left them still busy at this fierce and apparently aimless amusement. And as I went, I sang –

If a nobler waits for thee,

I will weep aside;
It is well that thou should'st be,
Of the nobler, bride.

For if love builds up the home,
Where the heart is free,
Homeless yet the heart must roam,
That has not found thee.

One must suffer: I, for her,
Yield in her my part.
Take her, thou art worthier –
Still! be still, my heart!

Gift ungotten! largess high
Of a frustrate will!
But to yield it lovingly
Is a something still.

Then a little song arose of itself in my soul; and I felt for the moment, while it sang sadly within me, as if I was once more walking up and down the white hall of Phantasy in the Fairy Palace. But this lasted no longer than the song, as will be seen.

Do not vex thy violet
Perfume to afford;
Else no odour thou wilt get
From its little hoard.

In thy lady's gracious eyes
Look not thou too long;
Else from them the glory flies,
And thou dost her wrong.

Come not thou too near the maid,
Clasp her not too wild;
Else the splendour is allayed,

And thy heart beguiled.

A crash of laughter, more discordant and deriding than any I had yet heard, invaded my ears. Looking on in the direction of the sound, I saw a little elderly woman, much taller, however, than the goblins I had just left, seated upon a stone by the side of the path. She rose, as I drew near, and came forward to meet me. She was very plain and commonplace in appearance, without being hideously ugly. Looking up in my face with a stupid sneer, she said: 'Isn't it a pity you haven't a pretty girl to walk all alone with you through this sweet country? How different everything would look! wouldn't it? Strange that one can never have what one would like best! How the roses would bloom and all that, even in this infernal hole! wouldn't they, Anodos? Her eyes would light up the old cave, wouldn't they?'

'That depends on who the pretty girl should be,' replied I.

'Not so very much matter that,' she answered; 'look here.'

I had turned to go away as I gave my reply, but now I stopped and looked at her. As a rough unsightly bud might suddenly blossom into the most lovely flower; or rather, as a sunbeam bursts through a shapeless cloud, and transfigures the earth; so burst a face of resplendent beauty, as it were *through* the unsightly visage of the woman, destroying it with light as it dawned through it. A summer sky rose above me, grey with heat; across a shining slumberous landscape, looked from afar the peaks of snow-capped mountains; and down from a great rock beside me, fell a sheet of water mad with its own delight.

'Stay with me,' she said, lifting up her exquisite face, and looking full in mine.

I drew back. Again the infernal laugh grated upon my ears; again the rocks closed in around me, and the ugly woman looked at me with wicked, mocking hazel eyes.

'You shall have your reward,' said she. 'You shall see your white lady again.'

'That lies not with you,' I replied, and turned and left her.

She followed me with shriek upon shriek of laughter, as I went on my way.

I may mention here, that although there was always light enough to see my path and a few yards on every side of me, I never could find out the

source of this sad sepulchral illumination.

CHAPTER 18

Im Sausen des Windes, im Brausen des Meers,
Und im Seufzen der eigenen Brust.

HEINE

In the wind's uproar, the sea's raging grim,
And the sighs that are born in him.

Ja, est wird zwar ein anderes Zeitalter kommen, wo es Licht wird, und wo der Mensch aus erhabnen Traümen erwacht, und die Traüme – wieder findet, weil er nichts verlor als den Schlaf.'

JEAN PAUL – *Hesperus*

From dreams of bliss shall men awake
One day, but not to weep:
The dreams remain; they only break
The mirror of the sleep.

How I got through this dreary part of my travels, I do not know. I do not think I was upheld by the hope that any moment the light might break in upon me; for I scarcely thought about that. I went on with a dull endurance, varied by moments of uncontrollable sadness; for more and more the conviction grew upon me that I should never see the white lady again. It may seem strange that one with whom I had held so little communion, should have so engrossed my thoughts; but benefits conferred awaken love in some minds, as surely as benefits received in others. Besides being delighted and proud that *my* songs had called the beautiful creature to life, the same fact caused me to feel a tenderness unspeakable for her, accompanied with a kind of feeling of property in her; for so the goblin Selfishness would reward the angel Love. When to all this is added, an overpowering sense of her beauty, and an unquestioning conviction that this was a true index to inward loveliness, it may be understood how it came to

pass that my imagination filled my whole soul with the play of its own multitudinous colours and harmonies around the form which yet stood, a gracious marble radiance, in the midst of *its* white hall of phantasy. The time passed by unheeded; for my thoughts were busy. Perhaps this was also in part the cause of my needing no food, and never thinking how I should find any, during this subterraneous part of my travels. How long they endured I could not tell, for I had no means of measuring time; and when I looked back, there was such a discrepancy between the decisions of my imagination and my judgment, as to the length of time that had passed, that I was bewildered, and gave up all attempts to arrive at any conclusion on the point.

A grey mist continually gathered behind me. When I looked back towards the past, this mist was the medium through which my eyes had to strain for a vision of what had gone by; and the form of the white lady had receded into an unknown region. At length the country of rock began to close again around me, gradually and slowly narrowing, till I found myself walking in a gallery of rock once more, both sides of which I could touch with my outstretched hands. It narrowed yet, until I was forced to move carefully, in order to avoid striking against the projecting pieces of rock. The roof sank lower and lower, until I was compelled, first to stoop, and then to creep on my hands and knees. It recalled terrible dreams of childhood; but I was not much afraid, because I felt sure that this was my path, and my only hope of leaving Fairy Land, of which I was now almost weary.

At length, on getting past an abrupt turn in the passage, through which I had to force myself, I saw, a few yards ahead of me, the long-forgotten daylight shining through a small opening, to which the path, if path it could now be called, led me. With great difficulty I accomplished these last few yards, and came forth to the day. I stood on the shore of a wintry sea, with a wintry sun just a few feet above its horizon-edge. It was bare, and waste, and grey. Hundreds of hopeless waves rushed constantly shorewards, falling exhausted upon a beach of great loose stones, that seemed to stretch miles and miles in both directions. There was nothing for the eye but mingling shades of grey; nothing for the ear but the rush of the coming, the roar of the breaking, and the moan of the retreating wave. No rock lifted up a sheltering severity above the dreariness around; even that from which I had myself emerged rose scarcely a foot above the opening by which I had

reached the dismal day, more dismal even than the tomb I had left. A cold, death-like wind swept across the shore, seeming to issue from a pale mouth of cloud upon the horizon. Sign of life was nowhere visible. I wandered over the stones, up and down the beach, a human embodiment of the nature around me. The wind increased; its keen waves flowed through my soul; the foam rushed higher up the stones; a few dead stars began to gleam in the east; the sound of the waves grew louder and yet more despairing. A dark curtain of cloud was lifted up, and a pale blue rent shone between its foot and the edge of the sea, out from which rushed an icy storm of frozen wind, that tore the waters into spray as it passed, and flung the billows in raving heaps upon the desolate shore. I could bear it no longer.

'I will not be tortured to death,' I cried; 'I will meet it half-way. The life within me is yet enough to bear me up to the face of Death, and then I die unconquered.'

Before it had grown so dark, I had observed, though without any particular interest, that on one part of the shore a low platform of rock seemed to run out far into the midst of the breaking waters. Towards this I now went, scrambling over smooth stones, to which scarce even a particle of sea-weed clung; and having found it, I got on it, and followed its direction, as near as I could guess, out into the tumbling chaos. I could hardly keep my feet against the wind and sea. The waves repeatedly all but swept me off my path; but I kept on my way, till I reached the end of the low promontory, which, in the fall of the waves, rose a good many feet above the surface, and, in their rise, was covered with their waters. I stood one moment, and gazed into the heaving abyss beneath me; then plunged headlong into the mounting wave below. A blessing, like the kiss of a mother, seemed to alight on my soul; a calm, deeper than that which accompanies a hope deferred, bathed my spirit. I sank far in the waters, and sought not to return. I felt as if once more the great arms of the beech-tree were around me, soothing me after the miseries I had passed through, and telling me, like a little sick child, that I should be better tomorrow. The waters of themselves lifted me, as with loving arms, to the surface. I breathed again, but did not unclose my eyes. I would not look on the wintry sea, and the pitiless grey sky. Thus I floated, till something gently touched me. It was a little boat floating beside me. How it came there I could not tell; but it rose and sank on the waters, and kept touching me in its fall, as if

with a human will to let me know that help was by me. It was a little gay-coloured boat, seemingly covered with glistering scales like those of a fish, all of brilliant rainbow hues. I scrambled into it, and lay down in the bottom, with a sense of exquisite repose. Then I drew over me a rich, heavy, purple cloth that was beside me; and, lying still, knew, by the sound of the waters, that my little bark was fleeting rapidly onwards. Finding, however, none of that stormy motion which the sea had manifested when I beheld it from the shore, I opened my eyes; and, looking first up, saw above me the deep violet sky of a warm southern night; and then, lifting my head, saw that I was sailing fast upon a summer sea, in the last border of a southern twilight. The aureole of the sun yet shot the extreme faint tips of its longest rays above the horizon-waves, and withdrew them not. It was a perpetual twilight. The stars, great and earnest, like children's eyes, bent down lovingly towards the waters; and the reflected stars within seemed to float up, as if longing to meet their embraces. But when I looked down, a new wonder met my view. For, vaguely revealed beneath the wave, I floated above my whole Past. The fields of my childhood flitted by; the halls of my youthful labours; the streets of great cities where I had dwelt; and the assemblies of men and women wherein I had wearied myself seeking for rest. But so indistinct were the visions, that sometimes I thought that I was sailing on a shallow sea, and that strange rocks and forests of sea-plants beguiled my eye, sufficiently to be transformed, by the magic of the phantasy, into well-known objects and regions. Yet, at times, a beloved form seemed to lie close beneath me in sleep; and the eyelids would tremble as if about to forsake the conscious eye; and the arms would heave upwards, as if in dreams they sought for a satisfying presence. But these motions might come only from the heaving of the waters between those forms and me. Soon I fell asleep, overcome with fatigue and delight. In dreams of unspeakable joy – of restored friendships; of revived embraces; of love which said it had never died; of faces that had vanished long ago, yet said with smiling lips that they knew nothing of the grave; of pardons implored, and granted with such bursting floods of love, that I was almost glad I had sinned – thus I passed through this wondrous twilight. I awoke with the feeling that I had been kissed and loved to my heart's content; and found that my boat was floating motionless by the grassy shore of a little island.

CHAPTER 19

In stiller Ruhe, in wechselloser Einfalt führ ich ununterbrochen das Bewusstseyn der ganzen Menschheit in mir.

SCHLEIERMACHER – *Monologen*

In still rest, in changeless simplicity, I bear, uninterrupted, the consciousness of the whole of Humanity within me.

– such a sweetness, such a grace
In all thy speech appear,
That what to th' eye a beauteous face,
That thy tongue is to the ear.

COWLEY

The water was deep to the very edge; and I sprang from the little boat upon a soft grassy turf. The island seemed rich with a profusion of all grasses and low flowers. All delicate lowly things were most plentiful; but no trees rose skywards; not even a bush overtopped the tall grasses, except in one place near the cottage I am about to describe, where a few plants of the gum-cistus, which drops every night all the blossoms that the day brings forth, formed a kind of natural arbour. The whole island lay open to the sky and sea. It rose nowhere more than a few feet above the level of the waters, which flowed deep all around its border. Here there seemed to be neither tide nor storm. A sense of persistent calm and fulness arose in the mind at the sight of the slow, pulse-like rise and fall of the deep, clear, unrippled waters against the bank of the island, for shore it could hardly be called, being so much more like the edge of a full, solemn river. As I walked over the grass towards the cottage, which stood at a little distance from the bank, all the flowers of childhood looked at me with perfect child-eyes out of the grass. My heart, softened by the dreams through which it had passed,

overflowed in a sad, tender love towards them. They looked to me like children impregnably fortified in a helpless confidence. The sun stood half way down the western sky, shining very soft and golden; and there grew a second world of shadows amidst the world of grasses and wild flowers.

The cottage was square, with low walls, and a high pyramidal roof thatched with long reeds, of which the withered blossoms hung over all the eaves. It is noticeable that most of the buildings I saw in Fairy Land were cottages. There was no path to a door, nor, indeed, was there any track worn by footsteps in the island. The cottage rose right out of the smooth turf. It had no windows that I could see; but there was a door in the centre of the side facing me, up to which I went. I knocked, and the sweetest voice I had ever heard said, 'Come in.' I entered. A bright fire was burning on a hearth in the centre of the earthen floor, and the smoke found its way out at an opening in the centre of the pyramidal roof. Over the fire hung a little pot, and over the pot bent a woman-face, the most wonderful, I thought, that I had ever beheld. For it was older than any countenance I had ever looked upon. There was not a spot in which a wrinkle could lie, where a wrinkle lay not. And the skin was ancient and brown, like old parchment. The woman's form was tall and spare: and when she stood up to welcome me, I saw that she was straight as an arrow. Could that voice of sweetness have issued from those lips of age? Mild as they were, could they be the portals whence flowed such melody? But the moment I saw her eyes, I no longer wondered at her voice: they were absolutely young – those of a woman of five-and-twenty, large, and of a clear grey. Wrinkles had beset them all about; the eyelids themselves were old, and heavy, and worn; but the eyes were very incarnations of soft light. She held out her hand to me, and the voice of sweetness again greeted me, with the single word, 'Welcome'. She set an old wooden chair for me, near the fire, and went on with her cooking. A wondrous sense of refuge and repose came upon me. I felt like a boy who has got home from school, miles across the hills, through a heavy storm of wind and snow. Almost, as I gazed on her, I sprang from my seat to kiss those old lips. And when, having finished her cooking, she brought some of the dish she had prepared, and set it on a little table by me, covered with a snow-white cloth, I could not help laying my head on her bosom, and bursting into happy tears. She put her arms round me, saying, 'Poor child; poor child!'

As I continued to weep, she gently disengaged herself; and, taking a spoon, put some of the food (I did not know what it was) to my lips, entreating me most endearingly to swallow it. To please her, I made an effort, and succeeded. She went on feeding me like a baby, with one arm round me, till I looked up in her face and smiled: then she gave me the spoon, and told me to eat, for it would do me good. I obeyed her, and found myself wonderfully refreshed. Then she drew near the fire an old-fashioned couch that was in the cottage, and making me lie down upon it, sat at my feet, and began to sing. Amazing store of old ballads rippled from her lips, over the pebbles of ancient tunes; and the voice that sang was sweet as the voice of a tuneful maiden that singeth ever from very fulness of song. The songs were almost all sad, but with a sound of comfort. One I can faintly recall. It was something like this:

Sir Aglovaile through the churchyard rode;
Sing, All alone I lie:
Little recked he where'er he yode.
All alone, up in the sky.

Swerved his courser, and plunged with fear;
All alone I lie:
His cry might have wakened the dead men near,
All alone, up in the sky.

The very dead that lay at his feet,
Lapt in the mouldy winding-sheet.

But he curbed him and spurred him, until he stood
Still in his place, like a horse of wood,

With nostrils uplift, and eyes wide and wan;
But the sweat in streams from his fetlocks ran.

A ghost grew out of the shadowy air,
And sat in the midst of her moony hair.

In her gleamy hair she sat and wept;

In the dreamful moon they lay and slept;

The shadows above, and the bodies below,
Lay and slept in the moonbeams slow.

And she sang, like the moan of an autumn wind
Over the stubble left behind:

Alas, how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

Alas, how hardly things go right!
'Tis hard to watch in a summer night,
For the sigh will come, and the kiss will stay,
And the summer night is a winter day.

'Oh, lovely ghost, my heart is woe,
'To see thee weeping and wailing so.

'Oh, lovely ghost,' said the fearless knight,
'Can the sword of a warrior set it right?

'Or prayer of bedesman, praying mild,
'As a cup of water a feverish child,

'Soothe thee at last, in dreamless mood,
'To sleep the sleep a dead lady should?

'Thine eyes they fill me with longing sore,
'As if I had known thee for evermore.

'Oh, lovely ghost, I could leave the day,
'To sit with thee in the moon away,

'If thou wouldst trust me, and lay thy head

‘To rest on a bosom that is not dead.’

The lady sprang up with a strange ghost cry,
And she flung her white ghost-arms on high;

And she laughed a laugh that was not gay,
And it lengthened out till it died away;

And the dead beneath turned and moaned,
And the yew-trees above they shuddered and groaned.

‘Will he love me twice with a love that is vain?
‘Will he kill the poor ghost yet again?

‘I thought thou wert good; but I said, and wept:
‘“Can I have dreamed who have not slept?”

‘And I knew, alas! or ever I would,
‘Whether I dreamed, or thou wert good.

‘When my baby died, my brain grew wild.
‘I awoke, and found I was with my child.’

‘If thou art the ghost of my Adelaide,
‘How is it? Thou wert but a village maid,

‘And thou seemest an angel lady white,
‘Though thin, and wan, and past delight.’

The lady smiled a flickering smile,
And she pressed her temples hard the while:

‘Thou seest that Death for a woman can
‘Do more than knighthood for a man.’

‘But show me the child thou callest mine.
‘Is she out tonight in the ghost’s sunshine?’

‘In St Peter’s Church she is playing on,
‘At hide-and-seek, with Apostle John.

‘When the moonbeams right through the window go,
‘Where the twelve are standing in glorious show,

‘She says the rest of them do not stir,
‘But one comes down to play with her.

‘Then I can go where I list, and weep,
‘For good St John my child will keep.’

‘Thy beauty filleth the very air.
‘Never saw I a woman so fair.’

‘Come, if thou darest, and sit by my side;
‘But do not touch me, or woe will betide.

‘Alas I am weak: I well might know
‘This gladness betokens some further woe.

‘Yet come. It will come. I will bear it. I can.
‘For thou lovest me yet – though but as a man.’

The knight dismounted in earnest speed;
Away through the tombstones thundered the steed,

And fell by the outer wall, and died.
But the knight he kneeled by the lady’s side;

Kneeled beside her in wondrous bliss,
Rapt in an everlasting kiss:

Though never his lips come the lady nigh,
And his eyes alone on her beauty lie.

All the night long, till the cock crew loud,
He kneeled by the lady, lapt in her shroud.

And what they said, I may not say:
Dead night was sweeter than living day.

How she made him so blissful glad
Who made her and found her so ghostly sad,

I may not tell; but it needs no touch
To make them blessed who love so much.

‘Come every night, my ghost, to me;
‘And one night I will come to thee.

‘’Tis good to have a ghostly wife:
‘She will not tremble at clang of strife;

‘She will only hearken, amid the din,
‘Behind the door, if he cometh in.’

And this is how Sir Aglovaile
Often walked in the moonlight pale.

And oft when the crescent but thinned the gloom,
Full orbéd moonlight filled his room;

And through beneath his chamber door,
Fell a ghostly gleam on the outer floor;

And they that passed, in fear averred
That murmured words they often heard.

’Twas then that the eastern crescent shone
Through the chancel window, and good St John

Played with the ghost-child all the night,
And the mother was free till the morning light,

And sped through the dawning night, to stay
With Aglovaile till the break of day.

And their love was a rapture, lone and high,
And dumb as the moon in the topmost sky.

One night Sir Aglovaile, weary, slept,
And dreamed a dream wherein he wept.

A warrior he was, not often wept he,
But this night he wept full bitterly.

He woke – beside him the ghost-girl shone
Out of the dark: ’twas the eve of St John.

He had dreamed a dream of a still, dark wood,
Where the maiden of old beside him stood;

But a mist came down, and caught her away,
And he sought her in vain through the pathless day,

Till he wept with the grief that can do no more,
And thought he had dreamt the dream before.

From bursting heart the weeping flowed on;
And lo! beside him the ghost-girl shone;

Shone like the light on a harbour’s breast,
Over the sea of his dream’s unrest;

Shone like the wondrous, nameless boon,
That the heart seeks ever, night or noon:

Warnings forgotten, when needed most,
He clasped to his bosom the radiant ghost.

She wailed aloud, and faded, and sank.
With upturn’d white face, cold and blank,

In his arms lay the corpse of the maiden pale,
And she came no more to Sir Aglovaile.

Only a voice, when winds were wild,
Sobbed and wailed like a chidden child.

Alas, how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

This was one of the simplest of her songs, which, perhaps, is the cause of my being able to remember it better than most of the others.

While she sung, I was in Elysium, with the sense of a rich soul upholding, embracing, and overhanging mine, full of all plenty and bounty. I felt as if she could give me everything I wanted; as if I should never wish to leave her, but would be content to be sung to and fed by her, day after day, as years rolled by. At last I fell asleep while she sang.

When I awoke, I knew not whether it was night or day. The fire had sunk to a few red embers, which just gave light enough to show me the woman standing a few feet from me, with her back towards me, facing the door by which I had entered. She was weeping, but very gently and plentifully. The tears seemed to come freely from her heart. Thus she stood for a few minutes; then, slowly turning at right angles to her former position, she faced another of the four sides of the cottage. I now observed for the first time, that here was a door likewise; and that, indeed, there was one in the centre of every side of the cottage. When she looked towards this second door, her tears ceased to flow, but sighs took their place. She often closed her eyes as she stood; and every time she closed her eyes, a gentle sigh seemed to be born in her heart and to escape at her lips. But when her eyes were open, her sighs were deep and very sad, and shook her whole frame. Then she turned towards the third door, and a cry as of fear or suppressed pain broke from her; but she seemed to hearten herself against the dismay, and to front it steadily; for, although I often heard a slight cry and sometimes a moan, yet she never moved or bent her head, and I felt sure that her eyes never closed. Then she turned to the fourth door, and I saw her shudder, and then stand still as a statue; till at last she turned towards me and approached the fire. I saw that her face was white as death. But she gave one look upwards, and smiled the sweetest, most child-innocent smile;

then heaped fresh wood on the fire, and, sitting down by the blaze, drew her wheel near her, and began to spin. While she spun, she murmured a low strange song, to which the hum of the wheel made a kind of infinite symphony. At length, she paused in her spinning and singing, and glanced towards me, like a mother who looks whether or not her child gives signs of waking. She smiled when she saw that my eyes were open. I asked her whether it was day yet. She answered, ‘It is always day here, so long as I keep my fire burning.’

I felt wonderfully refreshed; and a great desire to see more of the island awoke within me. I rose, and saying that I wished to look about me, went towards the door by which I had entered.

‘Stay a moment,’ said my hostess, with some trepidation in her voice. ‘Listen to me. You will not see what you expect when you go out of that door. Only remember this: whenever you wish to come back to me, enter wherever you see this mark.’

She held up her left hand between me and the fire. Upon the palm, which appeared almost transparent, I saw, in dark red, a mark like this , which I took care to fix in my mind.

She then kissed me, and bade me goodbye with a solemnity that awed me; and bewildered me too, seeing I was only going out for a little ramble in an island, which I did not believe larger than could easily be compassed in a few hours’ walk at most. As I went she resumed her spinning.

I opened the door, and stepped out. The moment my foot touched the smooth sward, I seemed to issue from the door of an old barn on my father’s estate, where, in the hot afternoons, I used to go and lie amongst the straw, and read. It seemed to me now that I had been asleep there. At a little distance in the field, I saw two of my brothers at play. The moment they caught sight of me, they called out to me to come and join them, which I did; and we played together as we had done years ago, till the red sun went down in the west, and the grey fog began to rise from the river. Then we went home together with a strange happiness. As we went, we heard the continually renewed larum of a landrail in the long grass. One of my brothers and I separated to a little distance, and each commenced running towards the part whence the sound appeared to come, in the hope of approaching the spot where the bird was, and so getting at least a sight of it, if we should not be able to capture the little creature. My father’s voice

recalled us from trampling down the rich long grass, soon to be cut down and laid aside for winter. I had quite forgotten all about Fairy Land, and the wonderful old woman, and the curious red mark.

My favourite brother and I shared the same bed. Some childish dispute arose between us; and our last words, ere we fell asleep, were not of kindness, notwithstanding the pleasures of the day. When I woke in the morning, I missed him. He had risen early, and had gone to bathe in the river. In another hour, he was brought home drowned. Alas! alas! if we had only gone to sleep as usual, the one with his arm about the other! Amidst the horror of the moment, a strange conviction flashed across my mind, that I had gone through the very same once before.

I rushed out of the house, I knew not why, sobbing and crying bitterly. I ran through the fields in aimless distress, till, passing the old barn, I caught sight of a red mark on the door. The merest trifles sometimes rivet the attention in the deepest misery; the intellect has so little to do with grief. I went up to look at this mark, which I did not remember ever to have seen before. As I looked at it, I thought I would go in and lie down amongst the straw, for I was very weary with running about and weeping. I opened the door; and there in the cottage sat the old woman as I had left her, at her spinning-wheel.

‘I did not expect you quite so soon,’ she said, as I shut the door behind me. I went up to the couch, and threw myself on it with that fatigue wherewith one awakes from a feverish dream of hopeless grief.

The old woman sang:

The great sun, benighted,
  May faint from the sky;
But love, once uplighted,
  Will never more die.

Form, with its brightness,
  From eyes will depart:
It walketh, in whiteness,

The halls of the heart.

Ere she had ceased singing, my courage had returned. I started from the couch, and, without taking leave of the old woman, opened the door of Sighs, and sprang into what should appear.

I stood in a lordly hall, where, by a blazing fire on the hearth, sat a lady, waiting, I knew, for some one long desired. A mirror was near me, but I saw that my form had no place within its depths, so I feared not that I should be seen. The lady wonderfully resembled my marble lady, but was altogether of the daughters of men, and I could not tell whether or not it was she. It was not for me she waited. The tramp of a great horse rang through the court without. It ceased, and the clang of armour told that his rider alighted, and the sound of his ringing heels approached the hall. The door opened; but the lady waited, for she would meet her lord alone. He strode in: she flew like a home-bound dove into his arms, and nestled on the hard steel. It was the knight of the soiled armour. But now the armour shone like polished glass; and, strange to tell, though the mirror reflected not my form, I saw a dim shadow of myself in the shining steel.

'O my beloved, thou art come, and I am blessed.'

Her soft fingers speedily overcame the hard clasp of his helmet; one by one she undid the buckles of his armour; and she toiled under the weight of the mail, as she *would* carry it aside. Then she unclasped his greaves, and unbuckled his spurs; and once more she sprang into his arms, and laid her head where she could now feel the beating of his heart. Then she disengaged herself from his embrace, and, moving back a step or two, gazed at him. He stood there a mighty form, crowned with a noble head, where all sadness had disappeared, or had been absorbed in solemn purpose. Yet I suppose that he looked more thoughtful than the lady had expected to see him, for she did not renew her caresses, although his face glowed with love, and the few words he spoke were as mighty deeds for strength; but she led him towards the hearth, and seated him in an ancient chair, and set wine before him, and sat at his feet.

'I am sad,' he said, 'when I think of the youth whom I met twice in the forests of Fairy Land; and who, you say, twice, with his songs, roused you from the death-sleep of an evil enchantment. There was something noble in

him, but it was a nobleness of thought, and not of deed. He may yet perish of vile fear.'

'Ah!' returned the lady, 'you saved him once; and for that I thank you; for may I not say that I somewhat loved him? But tell me how you fared, when you struck your battle-axe into the ash-tree, and he came and found you; for so much of the story you had told me, when the beggar-child came and took you away.'

'As soon as I saw him,' rejoined the knight, 'I knew that earthly arms availed not against such as he; and that my soul must meet him in its naked strength. So I unclasped my helm, and flung it on the ground; and, holding my good axe yet in my hand, gazed at him with steady eyes. On he came, a horror indeed, but I did not flinch. Endurance must conquer, where force could not reach. He came nearer and nearer, till the ghastly face was close to mine. A shudder as of death ran through me; but I think I did not move, for he seemed to quail, and retreated. As soon as he gave back, I struck one more sturdy blow on the stem of his tree, that the forest rang; and then looked at him again. He writhed and grinned with rage and apparent pain, and again approached me, but retreated sooner than before. I heeded him no more, but hewed with a will at the tree, till the trunk creaked, and the head bowed, and with a crash it fell to the earth. Then I looked up from my labour, and, lo! the spectre had vanished, and I saw him no more; nor ever in my wanderings have I heard of him again.'

'Well struck! well withstood! my hero,' said the lady.

'But,' said the knight, somewhat troubled, 'dost thou love the youth still?'

'Ah!' she replied, 'how can I help it? He woke me from worse than death; he loved me. I had never been for thee, if he had not sought me first. But I love him not as I love thee. He was but the moon of my night; thou art the sun of my day, O beloved.'

'Thou art right,' returned the noble man. 'It were hard, indeed, not to have some love in return for such a gift as he hath given thee. I, too, owe him more than words can speak.'

Humbled before them, with an aching and desolate heart, I yet could not restrain my words:

'Let me, then, be the moon of thy night still, O woman! And when thy day is beclouded, as the fairest days will be, let some song of mine comfort

thee, as an old, withered, half-forgotten thing, that belongs to an ancient mournful hour of uncompleted birth, which yet was beautiful in its time.'

They sat silent, and I almost thought they were listening. The colour of the lady's eyes grew deeper and deeper; the slow tears grew, and filled them, and overflowed. They rose, and passed, hand in hand, close to where I stood; and each looked towards me in passing. Then they disappeared through a door which closed behind them; but, ere it closed, I saw that the room into which it opened was a rich chamber, hung with gorgeous arras. I stood with an ocean of sighs frozen in my bosom. I could remain no longer. She was near me, and I could not see her; near me in the arms of one loved better than I, and I would not see her, and I would not be by her. But how to escape from the nearness of the best beloved? I had not this time forgotten the mark; for the fact that I could not enter the sphere of these living beings kept me aware that, for me, I moved in a vision, while they moved in life. I looked all about for the mark, but could see it nowhere; for I avoided looking just where it was. There the dull red cipher glowed, on the very door of their secret chamber. Struck with agony, I dashed it open, and fell at the feet of the ancient woman, who still spun on, the whole dissolved ocean of my sighs bursting from me in a storm of tearless sobs. Whether I fainted or slept, I do not know; but, as I returned to consciousness, before I seemed to have power to move, I heard the woman singing, and could distinguish the words:

O light of dead and of dying days!
  O Love! in thy glory go,
In a rosy mist and a moony maze,
  O'er the pathless peaks of snow.

But what is left for the cold grey soul,
  That moans like a wounded dove?
One wine is left in the broken bowl –
  'Tis – *To love, and love, and love*.

Now I could weep. When she saw me weeping, she sang:

Better to sit at the waters' birth,

Than a sea of waves to win;
To live in the love that floweth forth,
Than the love that cometh in.

Be thy heart a well of love, my child,
Flowing, and free, and sure;
For a cistern of love, though undefiled,
Keeps not the spirit pure.

I rose from the earth, loving the white lady as I had never loved her before.

Then I walked up to the door of Dismay, and opened it, and went out. And lo! I came forth upon a crowded street, where men and women went to and fro in multitudes. I knew it well; and, turning to one hand, walked sadly along the pavement. Suddenly I saw approaching me, a little way off, a form well known to me (*well-known!* – alas, how weak the word!) in the years when I thought my boyhood was left behind, and shortly before I entered the realm of Fairy Land. Wrong and Sorrow had gone together, hand-in-hand, as it is well they do. Unchangeably dear was that face. It lay in my heart as a child lies in its own white bed; but I could not meet her.

'Anything but that,' I said; and, turning aside, sprang up the steps to a door, on which I fancied I saw the mystic sign. I entered – not the mysterious cottage, but her home. I rushed wildly on, and stood by the door of her room.

'She is out,' I said, 'I will see the old room once more.'

I opened the door gently, and stood in a great solemn church. A deep-toned bell, whose sounds throbbed and echoed and swam through the empty building, struck the hour of midnight. The moon shone through the windows of the clerestory, and enough of the ghostly radiance was diffused through the church to let me see, walking with a stately, yet somewhat trailing and stumbling step, down the opposite aisle, for I stood in one of the transepts, a figure dressed in a white robe, whether for the night, or for that longer night which lies too deep for the day, I could not tell. Was it she? and was this her chamber? I crossed the church, and followed. The figure stopped, seemed to ascend as it were a high bed, and lay down. I reached the place where it lay, glimmering white. The bed was a tomb. The light was too ghostly to see clearly, but I passed my hand over the face and the

hands and the feet, which were all bare. They were cold – they were marble, but I knew them. It grew dark. I turned to retrace my steps, but found, ere long, that I had wandered into what seemed a little chapel. I groped about, seeking the door. Everything I touched belonged to the dead. My hands fell on the cold effigy of a knight who lay with his legs crossed and his sword broken beside him. He lay in his noble rest, and I lived on in ignoble strife. I felt for the left hand and a certain finger; I found there the ring I knew: he was one of my own ancestors. I was in the chapel over the burial-vault of my race. I called aloud: 'If any of the dead are moving here, let them take pity upon me, for I, alas! am still alive; and let some dead woman comfort me, for I am a stranger in the land of the dead, and see no light.' A warm kiss alighted on my lips through the dark. And I said, 'The dead kiss well; I will not be afraid.' And a great hand was reached out of the dark, and grasped mine for a moment, mightily and tenderly. I said to myself: 'The veil between, though very dark, is very thin.'

Groping my way further, I stumbled over the heavy stone that covered the entrance of the vault: and, in stumbling, descried upon the stone the mark, glowing in red fire. I caught the great ring. All my effort could not have moved the huge slab; but it opened the door of the cottage, and I threw myself once more, pale and speechless, on the couch beside the ancient dame. She sang once more: –

Thou dreamest: on a rock thou art,
  High o'er the broken wave;
Thou fallest with a fearful start,
  But not into thy grave;
For, waking in the morning's light,
Thou smilest at the vanished night.

So wilt thou sink, all pale and dumb,
  Into the fainting gloom;
But ere the coming terrors come,
  Thou wak'st – where is the tomb?
Thou wak'st – the dead ones smile above,
With hovering arms of sleepless love.

She paused; then sang again:

We weep for gladness, weep for grief;
The tears they are the same;
We sigh for longing, and relief;
The sighs have but one name.

And mingled in the dying strife,
Are moans that are not sad;
The pangs of death are throbs of life,
Its sighs are sometimes glad.

The face is very strange and white:
It is Earth's only spot
That feebly flickers back the light
The living seëth not.

I fell asleep, and slept a dreamless sleep, for I know not how long. When I awoke, I found that my hostess had moved from where she had been sitting, and now sat between me and the fourth door. I guessed that her design was to prevent my entering there. I sprang from the couch, and darted past her to the door. I opened it at once and went out. All I remember is a cry of distress from the woman: 'Don't go there, my child! Don't go there!' But I was gone.

I knew nothing more; or, if I did, I had forgot it all when I awoke to consciousness, lying on the floor of the cottage, with my head in the lap of the woman, who was weeping over me, and stroking my hair with both hands, talking to me as a mother might talk to a sick and sleeping, or a dead child. As soon as I looked up and saw her, she smiled through her tears; smiled with withered face and young eyes, till her countenance was irradiated with the light of the smile. Then she bathed my head and face and hands in an icy cold, colourless liquid, which smelt a little of damp earth. Immediately I was able to sit up. She rose and put some food before me. When I had eaten, she said:

'Listen to me, my child. You must leave me directly!'

‘Leave you!’ I said. ‘I am so happy with you. I never was so happy in my life.’

‘But you must go,’ she rejoined sadly. ‘Listen! What do you hear?’

‘I hear the sound as of a great throbbing of water.’

‘Ah! you do hear it? Well, I had to go through that door – the door of the Timeless’ (and she shuddered as she pointed to the fourth door) – ‘to find you; for if I had not gone, you would never have entered again; and because I went, the waters around my cottage will rise and rise, and flow and come, till they build a great firmament of waters over my dwelling. But as long as I keep my fire burning, they cannot enter. I have fuel enough for years; and after one year they will sink away again, and be just as they were before you came. I have not been buried for a hundred years now.’ And she smiled and wept.

‘Alas! alas!’ I cried. ‘I have brought this evil on the best and kindest of friends, who has filled my heart with great gifts.’

‘Do not think of that,’ she rejoined. ‘I can bear it very well. You will come back to me some day, I know. But I beg you, for my sake, my dear child, to do one thing. In whatever sorrow you may be, however inconsolable and irremediable it may appear, believe me that the old woman in the cottage, with the young eyes,’ (and she smiled), ‘knows something, though she must not always tell it, that would quite satisfy you about it, even in the worst moments of your distress. Now you must go.’

‘But how can I go, if the waters are all about, and if the doors all lead into other regions and other worlds?’

‘This is not an island,’ she replied; ‘but is joined to the land by a narrow neck; and for the door, I will lead you myself through the right one.’

She took my hand, and led me through the third door; whereupon I found myself standing in the deep grassy turf on which I had landed from the little boat, but upon the opposite side of the cottage. She pointed out the direction I must take, to find the isthmus and escape the rising waters.

Then putting her arms around me, she held me to her bosom; and as I kissed her, I felt as if I were leaving my mother for the first time, and could not help weeping bitterly. At length she gently pushed me away, and with the words, ‘Go, my son, and do something worth doing,’ turned back, and, entering the cottage, closed the door behind her.

I felt very desolate as I went.

CHAPTER 20

Thou hadst no fame; that which thou didst like good
Was but thy appetite that swayed thy blood
For that time to the best; for as a blast
That through a house comes, usually doth cast
Things out of order, yet by chance may come
And blow some one thing to his proper room,
So did thy appetite, and not thy zeal,
Sway thee by chance to do some one thing well.

FLETCHER'S *Faithful Shepherdess*

The noble hart that harbours vertuous thought,
And is with childe of glorious great intent,
Can never rest, untill it forth have brought
Th' eternall brood of glorie excellent.

SPENSER— *The Faerie Queene*

I had not gone very far before I felt that the turf beneath my feet was soaked with the rising waters. But I reached the isthmus in safety. It was rocky, and so much higher than the level of the peninsula, that I had plenty of time to cross. I saw on each side of me the water rising rapidly, altogether without wind, or violent motion, or broken waves, but as if a slow strong fire were glowing beneath it. Ascending a steep acclivity, I found myself at last in an open, rocky country. After travelling for some hours, as nearly in a straight line as I could, I arrived at a lonely tower, built on the top of a little hill, which overlooked the whole neighbouring country. As I approached, I heard the clang of an anvil; and so rapid were the blows, that I despaired of making myself heard till a pause in the work should ensue. It was some minutes before a cessation took place; but when it did, I knocked loudly, and had not long to wait; for, a moment after, the door was partly opened by a noble-looking youth, half-undressed, glowing with heat,

and begrimed with the blackness of the forge. In one hand he held a sword, so lately from the furnace that it yet shone with a dull fire. As soon as he saw me, he threw the door wide open, and standing aside, invited me very cordially to enter. I did so; when he shut and bolted the door most carefully, and then led the way inwards. He brought me into a rude hall, which seemed to occupy almost the whole of the ground floor of the little tower, and which I saw was now being used as a workshop. A huge fire roared on the hearth, beside which was an anvil. By the anvil stood, in similar undress, and in a waiting attitude, hammer in hand, a second youth, tall as the former, but far more slightly built. Reversing the usual course of perception in such meetings, I thought them, at first sight, very unlike; and, at the second glance, knew that they were brothers. The former, and apparently the elder, was muscular and dark, with curling hair, and large hazel eyes, which sometimes grew wondrously soft. The second was slender and fair, yet with a countenance like an eagle, and an eye which, though pale blue, shone with an almost fierce expression. He stood erect, as if looking from a lofty mountain crag, over a vast plain outstretched below. As soon as we entered the hall, the elder turned to me, and I saw that a glow of satisfaction shone on both their faces. To my surprise and great pleasure, he addressed me thus:

'Brother, will you sit by the fire and rest, till we finish this part of our work?'

I signified my assent; and, resolved to await any disclosure they might be inclined to make, seated myself in silence near the hearth.

The elder brother then laid the sword in the fire, covered it well over, and when it had attained a sufficient degree of heat, drew it out and laid it on the anvil, moving it carefully about, while the younger, with a succession of quick smart blows, appeared either to be welding it, or hammering one part of it to a consenting shape with the rest. Having finished, they laid it carefully in the fire; and, when it was very hot indeed, plunged it into a vessel full of some liquid, whence a blue flame sprang upwards, as the glowing steel entered. There they left it; and, drawing two stools to the fire, sat down, one on each side of me.

'We are very glad to see you, brother. We have been expecting you for some days,' said the dark-haired youth.

‘I am proud to be called your brother,’ I rejoined; ‘and you will not think I refuse the name, if I desire to know why you honour me with it?’

‘Ah! then he does not know about it,’ said the younger. ‘We thought you had known of the bond betwixt us, and the work we have to do together. You must tell him, brother, from the first.’

So the elder began:

‘Our father is king of this country. Before we were born, three giant brothers had appeared in the land. No one knew exactly when, and no one had the least idea whence they came. They took possession of a ruined castle that had stood unchanged and unoccupied within the memory of any of the country people. The vaults of this castle had remained uninjured by time, and these, I presume, they made use of at first. They were rarely seen, and never offered the least injury to any one; so that they were regarded in the neighbourhood as at least perfectly harmless, if not rather benevolent beings. But it began to be observed, that the old castle had assumed somehow or other, no one knew when or how, a somewhat different look from what it used to have. Not only were several breaches in the lower part of the walls built up, but actually some of the battlements which yet stood, had been repaired, apparently to prevent them from falling into worse decay, while the more important parts were being restored. Of course, everyone supposed the giants must have a hand in the work, but no one ever saw them engaged in it. The peasants became yet more uneasy, after one, who had concealed himself, and watched all night, in the neighbourhood of the castle, reported that he had seen, in full moonlight, the three huge giants working with might and main, all night long, restoring to their former position some massive stones, formerly steps of a grand turnpike stair, a great portion of which had long since fallen, along with part of the wall of the round tower in which it had been built. This wall they were completing, foot by foot, along with the stair. But the people said they had no just pretext for interfering: although the real reason for letting the giants alone was, that everybody was far too much afraid of them to interrupt them.

‘At length, with the help of a neighbouring quarry, the whole of the external wall of the castle was finished. And now the country folks were in greater fear than before. But for several years the giants remained very peaceful. The reason of this was afterwards supposed to be the fact, that they were distantly related to several good people in the country; for, as

long as these lived, they remained quiet; but as soon as they were all dead the real nature of the giants broke out. Having completed the outside of their castle, they proceeded, by spoiling the country houses around them, to make a quite luxurious provision for their comfort within. Affairs reached such a pass, that the news of their robberies came to my father's ears; but he, alas; was so crippled in his resources, by a war he was carrying on with a neighbouring prince, that he could only spare a very few men, to attempt the capture of their stronghold. Upon these the giants issued in the night, and slew every man of them. And now, grown bolder by success and impunity, they no longer confined their depredations to property, but began to seize the persons of their distinguished neighbours, knights and ladies, and hold them in durance, the misery of which was heightened by all manner of indignity, until they were redeemed by their friends, at an exorbitant ransom. Many knights have adventured their overthrow, but to their own instead; for they have all been slain, or captured, or forced to make a hasty retreat. To crown their enormities, if any man now attempts their destruction, they, immediately upon his defeat, put one or more of their captives to a shameful death, on a turret in sight of all passers-by; so that they have been much less molested of late; and we, although we have burned, for years, to attack these demons and destroy them, dared not, for the sake of their captives, risk the adventure, before we should have reached at least our earliest manhood. Now, however, we are preparing for the attempt; and the grounds of this preparation are these. Having only the resolution, and not the experience, necessary for the undertaking, we went and consulted a lonely woman of wisdom, who lives not very far from here, in the direction of the quarter from which you have come. She received us most kindly, and gave us what seems to us the best of advice. She first inquired what experience we had had in arms. We told her we had been well exercised from our boyhood, and for some years had kept ourselves in constant practice, with a view to this necessity.

'"But you have not actually fought for life and death?" said she.

'We were forced to confess we had not.

'"So much the better in some respects," she replied. "Now, listen to me. Go first and work with an armourer, for as long time as you find needful to obtain a knowledge of his craft; which will not be long, seeing your hearts will be all in the work. Then go to some lonely tower, you two alone.

Receive no visits from man or woman. There forge for yourselves every piece of armour that you wish to wear, or to use, in your coming encounter. And keep up your exercises. As, however, two of you can be no match for the three giants, I will find you, if I can, a third brother, who will take on himself the third share of the fight, and the preparation. Indeed, I have already seen one who will, I think, be the very man for your fellowship; but it will be some time before he comes to me. He is wandering now without an aim. I will show him to you in a glass, and, when he comes, you will know him at once. If he will share your endeavours, you must teach him all you know, and he will repay you well, in present song, and in future deeds."

'She opened the door of a curious old cabinet that stood in the room. On the inside of this door was an oval convex mirror. Looking in it for some time, we at length saw reflected the place where we stood, and the old dame seated in her chair. Our forms were not reflected. But at the feet of the dame, lay a young man, yourself, weeping.

'"Surely this youth will not serve our ends," said I, "for he weeps."

'The old woman smiled. "Past tears are present strength," said she.

'"Oh!" said my brother, "I saw you weep once over an eagle you shot."

'"That was because it was so like you, brother," I replied; "but indeed, this youth may have better cause for tears than that – I was wrong."

'"Wait a while," said the woman; "if I mistake not, he will make you weep till your tears are dry for ever. Tears are the only cure for weeping. And you may have need of the cure, before you go forth to fight the giants. You must wait for him, in your tower, till he comes."

'Now, if you will join us, we will soon teach you to make your armour; and we will fight together, and work together, and love each other as never three loved before. And you will sing to us, will you not?'

'That I will, when I can,' I answered; 'but it is only at times that the power of song comes upon me. For that I must wait; but I have a feeling that if I work well, song will not be far off to enliven the labour.'

This was all the compact made: the brothers required nothing more, and I did not think of giving anything more. I rose, and threw off my upper garments.

'I know the uses of the sword,' I said. 'I am ashamed of my white hands beside yours so nobly soiled and hard; but that shame will soon be wiped away.'

‘No, no; we will not work today. Rest is as needful as toil. Bring the wine, brother; it is your turn to serve today.’

The younger brother soon covered a table with rough viands, but good wine; and we ate and drank heartily, beside our work. Before the meal was over, I had learned all their story. Each had something in his heart which made the conviction, that he would victoriously perish in the coming conflict, a real sorrow to him. Otherwise they thought they would have lived enough. The causes of their trouble were respectively these: –

While they wrought with an armourer, in a city famed for workmanship in steel and silver, the elder had fallen in love with a lady as far beneath him in real rank, as she was above the station he had as apprentice to an armourer. Nor did he seek to further his suit by discovering himself; but there was simply so much manhood about him, that no one ever thought of rank when in his company. This is what his brother said about it. The lady could not help loving him in return. He told her when he left her, that he had a perilous adventure before him, and that when it was achieved, she would either see him return to claim her, or hear that he had died with honour. The younger brother’s grief arose from the fact, that, if they were both slain, his old father, the king, would be childless. His love for his father was so exceeding, that to one unable to sympathise with it, it would have appeared extravagant. Both loved him equally at heart; but the love of the younger had been more developed, because his thoughts and anxieties had not been otherwise occupied. When at home, he had been his constant companion; and, of late, had ministered to the infirmities of his growing age. The youth was never weary of listening to the tales of his sire’s youthful adventures; and had not yet in the smallest degree lost the conviction, that his father was the greatest man in the world. The grandest triumph possible to his conception was, to return to his father, laden with the spoils of one of the hated giants. But they both were in some dread, lest the thought of the loneliness of these two might occur to them, in the moment when decision was most necessary, and disturb, in some degree, the self-possession requisite for the success of their attempt. For, as I have said, they were yet untried in actual conflict. ‘Now,’ thought I, ‘I see to what the powers of my gift must minister.’ For my own part, I did not dread death, for I had nothing to care to live for; but I dreaded the encounter

because of the responsibility connected with it. I resolved however to work hard, and thus grow cool, and quick, and forceful.

The time passed away in work and song, in talk and ramble, in friendly fight and brotherly aid. I would not forge for myself armour of heavy mail like theirs, for I was not so powerful as they, and depended more for any success I might secure, upon nimbleness of motion, certainty of eye, and ready response of hand. Therefore I began to make for myself a shirt of steel plates and rings; which work, while more troublesome, was better suited to me than the heavier labour. Much assistance did the brothers give me, even after, by their instructions, I was able to make some progress alone. Their work was in a moment abandoned, to render any required aid to mine. As the old woman had promised, I tried to repay them with song; and many were the tears they both shed, over my ballads and dirges. The songs they liked best to hear were two which I made for them. They were not half so good as many others I knew, especially some I had learned from the wise woman in the cottage; but what comes nearest to our needs we like the best.

I

The king sat on his throne,
Glowing in gold and red;
The crown in his right hand shone,
And the grey hairs crowned his head.

His only son walks in,
And in walls of steel he stands:
‘Make me, O father, strong to win,
‘With the blessing of holy hands.’

He knelt before his sire,
Who blessed him with feeble smile;
His eyes shone out with a kingly fire,
But his old lips quivered the while.

‘Go to the fight, my son,
‘Bring back the giant’s head;

‘And the crown with which my brows have done,
‘Shall glitter on thine instead.’

‘My father, I seek no crown,
‘But unspoken praise from thee;
‘For thy people’s good, and thy renown,
‘I will die to set them free.’

The king sat down and waited there,
And rose not, night nor day;
Till a sound of shouting filled the air,
And cries of a sore dismay.

Then like a king he sat once more,
With the crown upon his head;
And up to the throne the people bore
A mighty giant dead.

And up to the throne the people bore
A pale and lifeless boy.
The king rose up like a prophet of yore,
In a lofty, deathlike joy.

He put the crown on the chilly brow:
‘Thou should’st have reigned with me;
‘But Death is the king of both, and now
‘I go to obey with thee.

‘Surely some good in me there lay,
‘To beget the noble one.’
The old man smiled like a winter day,
And fell beside his son.

II

‘O lady, thy lover is dead,’ they cried;
‘He is dead, but hath slain the foe;
‘He hath left his name to be magnified

‘In a song of wonder and woe.’

‘Alas! I am well repaid,’ said she,
‘With a pain that stings like joy;
‘For I feared, from his tenderness to me,
‘That he was but a feeble boy.

‘Now I shall hold my head on high,
‘The queen among my kind.
‘If ye hear a sound, ’tis only a sigh
‘For a glory left behind.’

The first three times I sang these songs, they both wept passionately. But after the third time, they wept no more. Their eyes shone, and their faces grew pale, but they never wept at any of my songs again.

CHAPTER 21

I put my life in my hands.

The Book of Judges

At length, with much toil and equal delight, our armour was finished. We armed each other, and tested the strength of the defence, with many blows of loving force. I was inferior in strength to both my brothers, but a little more agile than either; and upon this agility, joined to precision in hitting with the point of my weapon, I grounded my hopes of success in the ensuing combat. I likewise laboured to develope yet more the keenness of sight with which I was naturally gifted; and, from the remarks of my companions, I soon learned that my endeavours were not in vain.

The morning arrived on which we had determined to make the attempt, and succeed or perish – perhaps both. We had resolved to fight on foot; knowing that the mishap of many of the knights who had made the attempt, had resulted from the fright of their horses at the appearance of the giants; and believing with Sir Gawain, that, though mare's sons might be false to us, the earth would never prove a traitor. But most of our preparations were, in their immediate aim at least, frustrated.

We rose, that fatal morning, by day-break. We had rested from all labour the day before, and now were fresh as the lark. We bathed in cold spring water, and dressed ourselves in clean garments, with a sense of preparation, as for a solemn festivity. When we had broken our fast, I took an old lyre, which I had found in the tower and had myself repaired, and sung for the last time the two ballads of which I have said so much already. I followed them with this, for a closing song: –

Oh, well for him who breaks his dream
    With the blow that ends the strife;
And, waking, knows the peace that flows

Around the pain of life!

We are dead, my brothers! Our bodies clasp,
As an armour, our souls about;
This hand is the battle-axe I grasp,
And this my hammer stout.

Fear not, my brothers, for we are dead;
No noise can break our rest;
The calm of the grave is about the head,
And the heart heaves not the breast.

And our life we throw to our people back,
To live with, a further store;
We leave it them, that there be no lack
In the land where we live no more.

Oh, well for him who breaks his dream
With the blow that ends the strife;
And, waking, knows the peace that flows
Around the noise of life!

As the last few tones of the instrument were following, like a dirge, the death of the song, we all sprang to our feet. For, through one of the little windows of the tower, towards which I had looked as I sang, I saw, suddenly rising over the edge of the slope on which our tower stood, three enormous heads. The brothers knew at once, by my looks, what caused my sudden movement. We were utterly unarmed, and there was no time to arm. But we seemed to adopt the same resolution simultaneously; for each caught up his favourite weapon, and, leaving his defence behind, sprang to the door. I snatched up a long rapier, abruptly, but very finely pointed, in my sword-hand, and in the other a sabre; the elder brother seized his heavy battle-axe; and the younger, a great, two-handed sword, which he wielded in one hand, like a feather. We had just time to get clear of the tower, embrace and say goodbye, and part to some little distance, that we might not incumber each other’s motions, ere the triple giant-brotherhood drew

near to attack us. They were about twice our height, and armed to the teeth. Through the visors of their helmets, their monstrous eyes shone with a horrible ferocity. I was in the middle position, and the middle giant approached me. My eyes were busy with his armour, and I was not a moment in settling my mode of attack. I saw that his body-armour was somewhat clumsily made, and that the overlappings in the lower part had more play than necessary; and I hoped that, in a fortunate moment, some joint would open a little, in a visible and accessible part. I stood till he came near enough to aim a blow at me with the mace, which has been, in all ages, the favourite weapon of giants, when, of course, I leaped aside, and let the blow fall upon the spot where I had been standing. I expected this would strain the joints of his armour yet more. Full of fury, he made at me again; but I kept him busy, constantly eluding his blows, and hoping thus to fatigue him. He did not seem to fear any assault from me, and I attempted none as yet; but while I watched his motions in order to avoid his blows, I, at the same time, kept equal watch upon those joints of his armour, through some one of which I hoped to reach his life. At length, as if somewhat fatigued, he paused a moment, and drew himself slightly up; I bounded forward, foot and hand, ran my rapier right through to the armour of his back, let go the hilt, and passing under his right arm, turned as he fell, and flew at him with my sabre. At one happy blow, I divided the band of his helmet, which fell off, and allowed me, with a second cut across the eyes, to blind him quite; after which I clove his head, and turned, uninjured, to see how my brothers had fared. Both the giants were down, but so were my brothers. I flew first to the one and then to the other couple. Both pairs of combatants were dead, and yet locked together, as in the death struggle. The elder had buried his battle-axe in the body of his foe, and had fallen beneath him as he fell. The giant had strangled him in his own death-agonies. The younger had nearly hewn off the left leg of his enemy; and, grappled with in the act, had, while they rolled together on the earth, found for his dagger a passage betwixt the gorget and cuirass of the giant, and stabbed him mortally in the throat. The blood from the giant’s throat was yet pouring over the hand of his foe, which still grasped the hilt of the dagger sheathed in the wound. They lay silent. I, the least worthy, remained the sole survivor in the lists.

As I stood exhausted amidst the dead, after the first worthy deed of my life, I suddenly looked behind me, and there lay the Shadow, black in the sunshine. I went into the lonely tower, and there lay the useless armour of the noble youths – supine as they. Ah, how sad it looked! It was a glorious death, but it was death. My songs could not comfort me now. I was almost ashamed that I was alive, when they, the true-hearted, were no more. And yet I breathed freer to think that I had gone through the trial, and had not failed. And perhaps I may be forgiven, if some feelings of pride arose in my bosom, when I looked down on the mighty form, that lay dead by my hand.

'After all, however,' I said to myself, and my heart sank, 'it was only skill. Your giant was but a blunderer.'

I left the bodies of friends and foes, peaceful enough when the death-fight was over, and, hastening to the country below, roused the peasants. They came with shouting and gladness, bringing waggons to carry the bodies. I resolved to take the princes home to their father, each as he lay, in the arms of his country's foe. But first I searched the giants, and found the keys of their castle, to which I repaired, followed by a great company of the people. It was a place of wonderful strength. I released the prisoners, knights and ladies, all in a sad condition, from the cruelties and neglects of the giants. It humbled me to see them crowding round me with thanks, when in truth the glorious brothers, lying dead by their lonely tower, were those to whom the thanks belonged. I had but aided in carrying out the thought born in their brain, and uttered in visible form before ever I laid hold thereupon. Yet I did count myself happy to have been chosen for their brother in this great deed.

After a few hours spent in refreshing and clothing the prisoners, we all commenced our journey towards the capital. This was slow at first; but, as the strength and spirits of the prisoners returned, it became more rapid; and in three days we reached the palace of the king. As we entered the city gates, with the huge bulks lying each on a waggon drawn by horses, and two of them inextricably intertwined with the dead bodies of their princes, the people raised a shout and then a cry, and followed in multitudes the solemn procession.

I will not attempt to describe the behaviour of the grand old king. Joy and pride in his sons overcame his sorrow at their loss. On me he heaped every kindness that heart could devise or hand execute. He used to sit and

question me, night after night, about everything that was in any way connected with them and their preparations. Our mode of life, and relation to each other, during the time we spent together, was a constant theme. He entered into the minutest details of the construction of the armour, even to a peculiar mode of riveting some of the plates, with unwearying interest. This armour I had intended to beg of the king, as my sole memorials of the contest; but, when I saw the delight he took in contemplating it, and the consolation it appeared to afford him in his sorrow, I could not ask for it; but, at his request, left my own, weapons and all, to be joined with theirs in a trophy, erected in the grand square of the palace. The king, with gorgeous ceremony, dubbed me knight with his own old hand, in which trembled the sword of his youth.

During the short time I remained, my company was, naturally, much courted by the young nobles. I was in a constant round of gaiety and diversion, notwithstanding that the court was in mourning. For the country was so rejoiced at the death of the giants, and so many of their lost friends had been restored to the nobility and men of wealth, that the gladness surpassed the grief. ‘Ye have indeed left your lives to your people, my great brothers!’ I said.

But I was ever and ever haunted by the old shadow, which I had not seen all the time that I was at work in the tower. Even in the society of the ladies of the court, who seemed to think it only their duty to make my stay there as pleasant to me as possible, I could not help being conscious of its presence, although it might not be annoying me at the time. At length, somewhat weary of uninterrupted pleasure, and nowise strengthened there by, either in body or mind, I put on a splendid suit of armour of steel inlaid with silver, which the old King had given me, and, mounting the horse on which it had been brought to me, took my leave of the palace, to visit the distant city in which the lady dwelt, whom the elder prince had loved. I anticipated a sore task, in conveying to her the news of his glorious fate; but this trial was spared me, in a manner as strange as anything that had happened to me in Fairy Land.

CHAPTER 22

Niemand hat meine Gestalt als der *Ich*.

Schoppe, in JEAN PAUL'S *Titan*

No one has my form but the *I*.

Joy's a subtil elf.
I think man's happiest when he forgets himself.

CYRIL TOURNEUR – *The Revenger's Tragedy*

On the third day of my journey, I was riding gently along a road, apparently little frequented, to judge from the grass that grew upon it. I was approaching a forest. Everywhere in Fairy Land, forests are the places where one may most certainly expect adventures. As I drew near, a youth, unarmed, gentle, and beautiful, who had just cut a branch from a yew growing on the skirts of the wood, evidently to make himself a bow, met me, and thus accosted me:

'Sir knight, be careful as thou ridest through this forest; for it is said to be strangely enchanted, in a sort which even those who have been witnesses of its enchantment, can hardly describe.'

I thanked him for his advice, which I promised to follow, and rode on. But the moment I entered the wood, it seemed to me that, if enchantment there was, it must be of a good kind; for the Shadow, which had been more than usually dark and distressing, since I had set out on this journey, suddenly disappeared. I felt a wonderful elevation of spirits, and began to reflect on my past life, and especially on my combat with the giants, with such satisfaction, that I had actually to remind myself, that I had only killed one of them; and that, but for the brothers, I should never have had the idea of attacking them, not to mention the smallest power of standing to it. Still I

rejoiced, and counted myself amongst the glorious knights of old; having even the unspeakable presumption – my shame and self-condemnation at the memory of it are such, that I write it as the only and sorest penance I can perform – to think of myself (will the world believe it?) as side by side with Sir Galahad! Scarcely had the thought been born in my mind, when, approaching me from the left, through the trees, I espied a resplendent knight, of mighty size, whose armour seemed to shine of itself, without the sun. When he drew near, I was astonished to see that this armour was like my own; nay, I could trace, line for line, the correspondence of the inlaid silver to the device on my own. His horse, too, was like mine in colour, form, and motion; save that, like his rider, he was greater and fiercer than his counterpart. The knight rode with beaver up. As he halted right opposite to me in the narrow path, barring my way, I saw the reflection of my countenance in the centre plate of shining steel on his breastplate. Above it rose the same face – his face – only, as I have said, larger and fiercer. I was bewildered. I could not help feeling some admiration of him, but it was mingled with a dim conviction that he was evil, and that I ought to fight with him.

'Let me pass,' I said.

'When I will,' he replied.

Something within me said: 'Spear in rest, and ride at him! else thou art for ever a slave.'

I tried, but my arm trembled so much, that I could not couch my lance. To tell the truth, I, who had overcome the giant, shook like a coward before this knight. He gave a scornful laugh, that echoed through the wood, turned his horse, and said, without looking round, 'Follow me.'

I obeyed, abashed and stupified. How long he led, and how long I followed, I cannot tell. 'I never knew misery before,' I said to myself. 'Would that I had at least struck him, and had had my death-blow in return! Why, then, do I not call to him to wheel and defend himself? Alas! I know not why, but I cannot. One look from him would cow me like a beaten hound.' I followed, and was silent.

At length we came to a dreary square tower, in the middle of a dense forest. It looked as if scarce a tree had been cut down to make room for it. Across the very door, diagonally, grew the stem of a tree, so large that there was just room to squeeze past it in order to enter. One miserable square hole

in the roof was the only visible suggestion of a window. Turret or battlement, or projecting masonry of any kind, it had none. Clear and smooth and massy, it rose from its base, and ended with a line straight and unbroken. The roof, carried to a centre from each of the four walls, rose slightly to the point where the rafters met. Round the base lay several little heaps of either bits of broken branches, withered and peeled, or half-whitened bones; I could not distinguish which. As I approached, the ground sounded hollow beneath my horse's hoofs. The knight took a great key from his pocket, and reaching past the stem of the tree, with some difficulty opened the door. 'Dismount;' he commanded. I obeyed. He turned my horse's head away from the tower, gave him a terrible blow with the flat side of his sword, and sent him madly tearing through the forest.

'Now,' said he, 'enter, and take your companion with you.'

I looked round: knight and horse had vanished, and behind me lay the horrible shadow. I entered, for I could not help myself; and the shadow followed me. I had a terrible conviction that the knight and he were one. The door closed behind me.

Now I was indeed in pitiful plight. There was literally nothing in the tower but my shadow and me. The walls rose right up to the roof; in which, as I had seen from without, there was one little square opening. This I now knew to be the only window the tower possessed. I sat down on the floor, in listless wretchedness. I think I must have fallen asleep, and have slept for hours; for I suddenly became aware of existence, in observing that the moon was shining through the hole in the roof. As she rose higher and higher, her light crept down the wall over me, till at last it shone right upon my head. Instantaneously the walls of the tower seemed to vanish away like a mist. I sat beneath a beech, on the edge of a forest, and the open country lay, in the moonlight, for miles and miles around me, spotted with glimmering houses and spires and towers. I thought with myself, 'Oh, joy! it was only a dream; the horrible narrow waste is gone, and I wake beneath a beech-tree, perhaps one that loves me, and I can go where I will.' I rose, as I thought, and walked about, and did what I would, but ever kept near the tree; for always, and, of course, since my meeting with the woman of the beech-tree far more than ever, I loved that tree. So the night wore on. I waited for the sun to rise, before I could venture to renew my journey. But as soon as the first faint light of the dawn appeared, instead of shining upon

me from the eye of the morning, it stole like a fainting ghost through the little square hole above my head; and the walls came out as the light grew, and the glorious night was swallowed up of the hateful day. The long dreary day passed. My shadow lay black on the floor. I felt no hunger, no need of food. The night came. The moon shone. I watched her light slowly descending the wall, as I might have watched, adown the sky, the long, swift approach of a helping angel. Her rays touched me, and I was free. Thus night after night passed away. I should have died but for this. Every night the conviction returned, that I was free. Every morning I sat wretchedly disconsolate. At length, when the course of the moon no longer permitted her beams to touch me, the night was dreary as the day. When I slept, I was somewhat consoled by my dreams; but all the time I dreamed, I knew that I was only dreaming. But one night, at length, the moon, a mere shred of pallour, scattered a few thin ghostly rays upon me; and I think I fell asleep and dreamed, I sat in an autumn night, before the vintage, on a hill overlooking my own castle. My heart sprang with joy. Oh, to be a child again, innocent, fearless, without shame or desire! I walked down to the castle. All were in consternation at my absence. My sisters were weeping for my loss. They sprang up and clung to me, with incoherent cries, as I entered. My old friends came flocking round me. A grey light shone on the roof of the hall. It was the light of the dawn shining through the square window of my tower. More earnestly than ever, I longed for freedom after this dream; more drearily than ever, crept on the next wretched day. I measured by the sunbeams, caught through the little window in the trap of my tower, how it went by, waiting only for the dreams of the night.

About noon, I started as if something foreign to all my senses and all my experience, had suddenly invaded me; yet it was only the voice of a woman singing. My whole frame quivered with joy, surprise, and the sensation of the unforeseen. Like a living soul, like an incarnation of Nature, the song entered my prison-house. Each tone folded its wings, and laid itself, like a caressing bird, upon my heart. It bathed me like a sea; inwrapt me like an odorous vapour; entered my soul like a long draught of clear spring-water; shone upon me like essential sunlight; soothed me like a mother’s voice and hand. Yet, as the clearest forest-well tastes sometimes of the bitterness of decayed leaves, so to my weary, prisoned heart, its cheerfulness had a sting of cold, and its tenderness unmanned me with the faintness of long-departed

joys. I wept half-bitterly, half-luxuriously; but not long. I dashed away the tears, ashamed of a weakness which I thought I had abandoned. Ere I knew, I had walked to the door, and seated myself with my ear against it, in order to catch every syllable of the revelation from the unseen outer world. And now I heard each word distinctly. The singer seemed to be standing or sitting near the tower, for the sounds indicated no change of place. The song was something like this: –

The sun, like a golden knot on high,
Gathers the glories of the sky,
And binds them into a shining tent,
Roofing the world with the firmament.
And through the pavilion the rich winds blow,
And through the pavilion the waters go.
And the birds for joy, and the trees for prayer,
Bowing their heads in the sunny air,
And for thoughts, the gently talking springs,
That come from the centre with secret things –
All make a music, gentle and strong,
Bound by the heart into one sweet song.
And amidst them all, the mother Earth
Sits with the children of her birth;
She tendeth them all, as a mother hen
Her little ones round her, twelve or ten:
Oft she sitteth, with hands on knee,
Idle with love for her family.
Go forth to her from the dark and the dust,
And weep beside her, if weep thou must;
If she may not hold thee to her breast,
Like a weary infant, that cries for rest;
At least she will press thee to her knee,
And tell a low, sweet tale to thee,
Till the hue to thy cheek, and the light to thine eye,
Strength to thy limbs, and courage high
To thy fainting heart, return amain,
And away to work thou goest again.

From the narrow desert, O man of pride,
Come into the house, so high and wide.

Hardly knowing what I did, I opened the door. Why had I not done so before? I do not know.

At first I could see no one; but when I had forced myself past the tree which grew across the entrance, I saw, seated on the ground, and leaning against the tree, with her back to my prison, a beautiful woman. Her countenance seemed known to me, and yet unknown. She looked up at me and smiled, when I made my appearance.

'Ah! were you the prisoner there? I am very glad I have wiled you out.'

'Do you know me then?'

'Do you not know me? But you hurt me, and that, I suppose, makes it easy for a man to forget. You broke my globe. Yet I thank you. Perhaps I owe you many thanks for breaking it. I took the pieces, all black, and wet with crying over them, to the Fairy Queen. There was no music and no light in them now. But she took them from me, and laid them aside; and made me go to sleep in a great hall of white, with black pillars, and many red curtains. When I woke in the morning, I went to her, hoping to have my globe again, whole and sound; but she sent me away without it, and I have not seen it since. Nor do I care for it now. I have something so much better. I do not need the globe to play to me; for I can sing. I could not sing at all before. Now I go about everywhere through Fairy Land, singing till my heart is like to break, just like my globe, for very joy at my own songs. And wherever I go, my songs do good, and deliver people. And now I have delivered you, and I am so happy.'

She ceased, and the tears came into her eyes.

All this time, I had been gazing at her; and now fully recognised the face of the child, glorified in the countenance of the woman. I was ashamed and humbled before her; but a great weight was lifted from my thoughts. I knelt before her, and thanked her, and begged her to forgive me.

'Rise, rise,' she said; 'I have nothing to forgive; I thank you. But now I must be gone, for I do not know how many may be waiting for me, here and there, through the dark forests; and they cannot come out till I come.'

She rose, and with a smile and a farewell, turned and left me. I dared not ask her to stay; in fact, I could hardly speak to her. Between her and me,

there was a great gulf. She was uplifted by sorrow and well-doing, into a region I could hardly hope ever to enter. I watched her departure, as one watches a sunset. She went like a radiance through the dark wood, which was henceforth bright to me, from simply knowing that such a creature was in it. She was bearing the sun to the unsunned spots. The light and the music of her broken globe were now in her heart and her brain. As she went, she sang; and I caught these few words of her song; and the tones seemed to linger and wind about the trees after she had disappeared: –

Thou goest thine, and I go mine –
  Many ways we wend;
Many days, and many ways,
  Ending in one end.

Many a wrong, and its curing song;
  Many a road, and many an inn;
Room to roam, but only one home
  For all the world to win.

And so she vanished. With a sad heart, soothed by humility, and the knowledge of her peace and gladness, I bethought me what now I should do. First, I must leave the tower far behind me, lest, in some evil moment, I might be once more caged within its horrible walls. But it was ill walking in my heavy armour; and besides I had now no right to the golden spurs and the resplendent mail, fitly dulled with long neglect. I might do for a squire; but I honoured knighthood too highly, to call myself any longer one of the noble brotherhood. I stripped off all my armour, piled it under the tree, just where the lady had been seated, and took my unknown way, eastward through the woods. Of all my weapons, I carried only a short axe in my hand. Then first I knew the delight of being lowly; of saying to myself, ‘I am what I am, nothing more.’ ‘I have failed,’ I said; ‘I have lost myself – would it had been my shadow.’ I looked round: the shadow was nowhere to be seen. Ere long, I learned that it was not myself, but only my shadow, that I had lost. I learned that it is better, a thousand-fold, for a proud man to fall and be humbled, than to hold up his head in his pride and fancied innocence. I learned that he that will be hero, will barely be a man; that he

that will be nothing but a doer of his work, is sure of his manhood. In nothing was my ideal lowered, or dimmed, or grown less precious; I only saw it too plainly, to set myself for a moment beside it. Indeed, my ideal soon became my life; whereas, formerly, my life had consisted in a vain attempt to behold, if not my ideal in myself, at least myself in my ideal. Now, however, I took, at first, what perhaps was a mistaken pleasure, in despising and degrading myself. Another self seemed to arise, like a white spirit from a dead man, from the dumb and trampled self of the past. Doubtless, this self must again die and be buried, and again, from its tomb, spring a winged child; but of this my history as yet bears not the record. Self will come to life even in the slaying of self; but there is ever something deeper and stronger than it, which will emerge at last from the unknown abysses of the soul: will it be as a solemn gloom, burning with eyes? or a clear morning after the rain? or a smiling child, that finds itself nowhere, and everywhere?

CHAPTER 23

High erected thought, seated in a heart of courtesy.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

A sweet attractive kinde of grace,
  A full assurance given by lookes,
Continuall comfort in a face,
  The lineaments of Gospell bookes.

SPENSER, on *Sir Philip Sidney*

I had not gone far, for I had but just lost sight of the hated tower, when a voice of another sort, sounding near or far, as the trees permitted or intercepted its passage, reached me. It was a full, deep, manly voice, but withal clear and melodious. Now it burst on the ear with a sudden swell, and anon, dying away as suddenly, seemed to come to me across a great space. Nevertheless, it drew nearer; till, at last, I could distinguish the words of the song, and get transient glimpses of the singer, between the columns of the trees. He came nearer, dawning upon me like a growing thought. He was a knight, armed from head to heel, mounted upon a strange-looking beast, whose form I could not understand. The words which I heard him sing were like these: –

Heart be stout,
  And eye be true;
Good blade out!
  And ill shall rue.

Courage, horse!
  Thou lackst no skill;
Well thy force

Hath matched my will.

For the foe,
With fiery breath,
At a blow,
Is still in death.

Gently, horse!
Tread fearlessly;
’Tis his corse
That burdens thee.

The sun’s eye
Is fierce at noon;
Thou and I
Will rest full soon.

And new strength
New work will meet;
Till, at length,
Long rest is sweet.

And now horse and rider had arrived near enough for me to see, fastened by the long neck to the hinder part of the saddle, and trailing its hideous length on the ground behind, the body of a great dragon. It was no wonder that, with such a drag at his heels, the horse could make but slow progress, notwithstanding his evident dismay. The horrid, serpent-like head, with its black tongue, forked with red, hanging out of its jaws, dangled against the horse’s side. Its neck was covered with long blue hair; its sides with scales of green and gold. Its back was of corrugated skin, of a purple hue. Its belly was similar in nature, but its colour was leaden, dashed with blotches of livid blue. Its skinny, bat-like wings and its tail were of a dull grey. It was strange to see how so many gorgeous colours, so many curving lines, and such beautiful things as wings and hair and scales, combined to form the horrible creature, intense in ugliness.

The knight was passing me with a salutation; but, as I walked towards him, he reined up, and I stood by his stirrup. When I came near him, I saw, to my surprise and pleasure likewise, although a sudden pain, like a birth of fire, sprang up in my heart, that it was the knight of the soiled armour, whom I knew before, and whom I had seen in the vision, with the lady of the marble. But I could have thrown my arms around him, because she loved him. This discovery only strengthened the resolution I had formed, before I recognised him, of offering myself to the knight, to wait upon him as a squire, for he seemed to be unattended. I made my request in as few words as possible. He hesitated for a moment, and looked at me thoughtfully. I saw that he suspected who I was, but that he continued uncertain of his suspicion. No doubt he was soon convinced of its truth; but all the time I was with him, not a word crossed his lips with reference to what he evidently concluded I wished to leave unnoticed, if not to keep concealed.

'Squire and knight should be friends,' said he: 'can you take me by the hand?' And he held out the great gauntleted right hand. I grasped it willingly and strongly. Not a word more was said. The knight gave the sign to his horse, which again began his slow march, and I walked beside and a little behind.

We had not gone very far before we arrived at a little cottage; from which, as we drew near, a woman rushed out with the cry:

'My child! my child! have you found my child?'

'I have found her,' replied the knight, 'but she is sorely hurt. I was forced to leave her with the hermit, as I returned. You will find her there, and I think she will get better. You see I have brought you a present. This wretch will not hurt you again.' And he undid the creature's neck, and flung the frightful burden down by the cottage-door.

The woman was now almost out of sight in the wood; but the husband stood at the door, with speechless thanks in his face.

'You must bury the monster,' said the knight. 'If I had arrived a moment later, I should have been too late. But now you need not fear, for such a creature as this very rarely appears, in the same part, twice during a life-time.'

'Will you not dismount and rest you, Sir Knight?' said the peasant, who had, by this time, recovered himself a little.

‘That I will, thankfully,’ said he; and, dismounting, he gave the reins to me, and told me to unbridle the horse, and lead him into the shade. ‘You need not tie him up,’ he added; ‘he will not run away.’

When I returned, after obeying his orders, and entered the cottage, I saw the knight seated, without his helmet, and talking most familiarly with the simple host. I stood at the open door for a moment, and, gazing at him, inwardly justified the white lady in preferring him to me. A nobler countenance I never saw. Loving-kindness beamed from every line of his face. It seemed as if he would repay himself for the late arduous combat, by indulging in all the gentleness of a womanly heart. But when the talk ceased for a moment, he seemed to fall into a reverie. Then the exquisite curves of the upper lip vanished. The lip was lengthened and compressed at the same moment. You could have told that, within the lips, the teeth were firmly closed. The whole face grew stern and determined, all but fierce; only the eyes burned on like a holy sacrifice, uplift on a granite rock.

The woman entered, with her mangled child in her arms. She was pale as her little burden. She gazed, with a wild love and despairing tenderness, on the still, all but dead face, white and clear from loss of blood and terror.

The knight rose. The light that had been confined to his eyes, now shone from his whole countenance. He took the little thing in his arms, and, with the mother’s help, undressed her, and looked to her wounds. The tears flowed down his face as he did so. With tender hands he bound them up, kissed the pale cheek, and gave her back to her mother. When he went home, all his tale would be of the grief and joy of the parents; while to me, who had looked on, the gracious countenance of the armed man, beaming from the panoply of steel, over the seemingly dead child, while the powerful hands turned it and shifted it, and bound it, if possible even more gently than the mother’s, formed the centre of the story.

After we had partaken of the best they could give us, the knight took his leave, with a few parting instructions to the mother, as to how she should treat the child.

I brought the knight his steed, held the stirrup while he mounted, and then followed him through the wood. The horse, delighted to be free of his hideous load, bounded beneath the weight of man and armour, and could hardly be restrained from galloping on. But the knight made him time his powers to mine, and so we went on for an hour or two. Then the knight

dismounted, and compelled me to get into the saddle, saying: ‘Knight and squire must share the labour.’

Holding by the stirrup, he walked along by my side, heavily clad as he was, with apparent ease. As we went, he led a conversation, in which I took what humble part my sense of my condition would permit me.

‘Somehow or other,’ said he, ‘notwithstanding the beauty of this country of Faerie, in which we are, there is much that is wrong in it. If there are great splendours, there are corresponding horrors; heights and depths; beautiful women and awful fiends; noble men and weaklings. All a man has to do, is to better what he can. And if he will settle it with himself, that even renown and success are in themselves of no great value, and be content to be defeated, if so be that the fault is not his; and so go to his work with a cool brain and a strong will, he will get it done; and fare none the worse in the end, that he was not burdened with provision and precaution.’

‘But he will not always come off well,’ I ventured to say.

‘Perhaps not,’ rejoined the knight, ‘in the individual act; but the result of his lifetime will content him.’

‘So it will fare with you, doubtless,’ thought I; ‘but for me—’

Venturing to resume the conversation after a pause, I said, hesitatingly:

‘May I ask for what the little beggar-girl wanted your aid, when she came to your castle to find you?’

He looked at me for a moment in silence, and then said: –

‘I cannot help wondering how you know of that; but there is something about you quite strange enough to entitle you to the privilege of the country; namely, to go unquestioned. I, however, being only a man, such as you see me, am ready to tell you anything you like to ask me, as far as I can. The little beggar-girl came into the hall where I was sitting, and told me a very curious story, which I can only recollect very vaguely, it was so peculiar. What I can recall is, that she was sent to gather wings. As soon as she had gathered a pair of wings for herself, she was to fly away, she said, to the country she came from; but where that was, she could give no information. She said she had to beg her wings from the butterflies and moths; and whenever she begged, no one refused her. But she needed a great many of the wings of butterflies and moths to make a pair for her; and so she had to wander about day after day, looking for butterflies, and night after night, looking for moths; and then she begged for their wings. But the day before,

she had come into a part of the forest, she said, where there were multitudes of splendid butterflies flitting about, with wings which were just fit to make the eyes in the shoulders of hers; and she knew she could have as many of them as she liked for the asking; but as soon as she began to beg, there came a great creature right up to her, and threw her down, and walked over her. When she got up, she saw the wood was full of these beings stalking about, and seeming to have nothing to do with each other. As soon as ever she began to beg, one of them walked over her; till at last, in dismay, and in growing horror of the senseless creatures, she had run away to look for somebody to help her. I asked her what they were like. She said, like great men, made of wood, without knee or elbow-joints, and without any noses or mouths or eyes in their faces. I laughed at the little maiden, thinking she was making child's game of me; but, although she burst out laughing too, she persisted in asserting the truth of her story.

'"Only come, knight, come and see; I will lead you."

'So I armed myself, to be ready for anything that might happen, and followed the child; for, though I could make nothing of her story, I could see she was a little human being in need of some help or other. As she walked before me, I looked attentively at her. Whether or not it was from being so often knocked down and walked over, I could not tell, but her clothes were very much torn, and in several places her white skin was peeping through. I thought she was humpbacked; but on looking more closely, I saw, through the tatters of her frock – do not laugh at me – a bunch on each shoulder, of the most gorgeous colours. Looking yet more closely, I saw that they were of the shape of folded wings, and were made of all kinds of butterfly-wings and moth-wings, crowded together like the feathers on the individual butterfly pinion; but, like them, most beautifully arranged, and producing a perfect harmony of colour and shade. I could now more easily believe the rest of her story; especially as I saw, every now and then, a certain heaving motion in the wings, as if they longed to be uplifted and outspread. But beneath her scanty garments complete wings could not be concealed, and indeed, from her own story, they were yet unfinished.

'After walking for two or three hours (how the little girl found her way, I could not imagine) we came to a part of the forest, the very air of which was quivering with the motions of multitudes of resplendent butterflies; as

gorgeous in colour, as if the eyes of peacock's feathers had taken to flight, but of infinite variety of hue and form, only that the appearance of some kind of eye on each wing predominated. "There they are, there they are!" cried the child, in a tone of victory mingled with terror. Except for this tone, I should have thought she referred to the butterflies, for I could see nothing else. But at that moment an enormous butterfly, whose wings had great eyes of blue surrounded by confused cloudy heaps of more dingy colouring, just like a break in the clouds on a stormy day towards evening, settled near us. The child instantly began murmuring: "Butterfly, butterfly, give me your wings;" when, the moment after she fell to the ground, and began crying as if hurt. I drew my sword and heaved a great blow in the direction in which the child had fallen. It struck something, and instantly the most grotesque imitation of a man became visible. You see this Fairy Land is full of oddities and all sorts of incredibly ridiculous things, which a man is compelled to meet and treat as real existences, although all the time he feels foolish for doing so. This being, if being it could be called, was like a block of wood roughly hewn into the mere outlines of a man; and hardly so, for it had but head, body, legs, and arms – the head without a face, and the limbs utterly formless. I had hewn off one of its legs, but the two portions moved on as best they could, quite independent of each other; so that I had done no good. I ran after it, and clove it in twain from the head downwards; but it could not be convinced that its vocation was not to walk over people; for, as soon as the little girl began her begging again, all three parts came bustling up; and if I had not interposed my weight between her and them, she would have been trampled again under them. I saw that something else must be done. If the wood was full of the creatures, it would be an endless work to chop them so small that they could do no injury; and then, besides, the parts would be so numerous, that the butterflies would be in danger from the drift of flying chips. I served this one so, however; and then told the girl to beg again, and point out the direction in which one was coming. I was glad to find, however, that I could now see him myself, and wondered how they could have been invisible before. I would not allow him to walk over the child; but while I kept him off, and she began begging again, another appeared; and it was all I could do, from the weight of my armour, to protect her from the stupid, persevering efforts of the two. But suddenly the right plan occurred to me. I tripped one of them up, and, taking him by the

legs, set him up on his head, with his heels against a tree. I was delighted to find he could not move. Meantime the poor child was walked over by the other, but it was for the last time. Whenever one appeared, I followed the same plan – tripped him up and set him on his head; and so the little beggar was able to gather her wings without any trouble, which occupation she continued for several hours in my company.'

'What became of her?' I asked.

'I took her home with me to my castle, and she told me all her story; but it seemed to me, all the time, as if I were hearing a child talk in its sleep. I could not arrange her story in my mind at all, although it seemed to leave hers in some certain order of its own. My wife—'

Here the Knight checked himself, and said no more. Neither did I urge the conversation farther.

Thus we journeyed for several days, resting at night in such shelter as we could get; and when no better was to be had, lying in the forest under some tree, on a couch of old leaves.

I loved the knight more and more. I believe never squire served his master with more care and joyfulness than I. I tended his horse; I cleaned his armour; my skill in the craft enabled me to repair it when necessary; I watched his needs; and was well repaid for all, by the love itself which I bore him.

'This,' I said to myself, 'is a true man. I will serve him, and give him all worship, seeing in him the embodiment of what I would fain become. If I cannot be noble myself, I will yet be servant to his nobleness.' He, in return, soon showed me such signs of friendship and respect, as made my heart glad; and I felt that, after all, mine would be no lost life, if I might wait on him to the world's end, although no smile but his should greet me, and no one but him should say, 'Well done! he was a good servant!' at last. But I burned to do something more for him than the ordinary routine of a squire's duty permitted.

One afternoon, we began to observe an appearance of roads in the wood. Branches had been cut down, and openings made, where footsteps had worn no path below. These indications increased as we passed on; till, at length, we came into a long, narrow avenue, formed by felling the trees in its line, as the remaining roots evidenced. At some little distance, on both hands, we observed signs of similar avenues, which appeared to converge with ours,

towards one spot. Along these, we indistinctly saw several forms moving, which seemed, with ourselves, to approach the common centre. Our path brought us, at last, up to a wall of yew trees, growing close together, and intertwining their branches so, that nothing could be seen beyond it. An opening was cut in it like a door, and all the wall was trimmed smooth and perpendicular. The knight dismounted, and waited till I had provided for his horse's comfort; upon which we entered the place together.

It was a great space, bare of trees, and enclosed by four walls of yew, similar to that through which we had entered. These trees grew to a very great height, and did not divide from each other till close to the top, where their summits formed a row of conical battlements all around the walls. The space contained was a parallelogram of great length. Along each of the two longer sides of the interior, were ranged three ranks of men, in white robes, standing silent and solemn, each with a sword by his side, although the rest of his costume and bearing was more priestly than soldierly. For some distance inwards, the space between these opposite rows was filled with a company of men and women and children, in holiday attire. The looks of all were directed inwards, towards the further end. Far beyond the crowd, in a long avenue, seeming to narrow in the distance, went the long rows of the white-robed men. On what the attention of the multitude was fixed, we could not tell, for the sun had set before we arrived, and it was growing dark within. It grew darker and darker. The multitude waited in silence. The stars began to shine down into the enclosure, and they grew brighter and larger every moment. A wind arose, and swayed the pinnacles of the tree-tops; and made a strange sound, half like music, half like moaning, through the close branches and leaves of the tree-walls. A young girl who stood beside me, clothed in the same dress as the priests, bowed her head and grew pale with awe.

The knight whispered to me, 'How solemn it is! Surely they wait to hear the voice of a prophet. There is something good near!'

But I, though somewhat shaken by the feeling expressed by my master, yet had an unaccountable conviction that here was something bad. So I resolved to be keenly on the watch for what should follow.

Suddenly a great star, like a sun, appeared high in the air over the temple, illuminating it throughout; and a great song arose from the men in white, which went rolling round and round the building, now receding to the end,

and now approaching, down the other side, the place where we stood. For some of the singers were regularly ceasing, and the next to them as regularly taking up the song; so that it crept onwards, with gradations produced by changes which could not themselves be detected, for only a few of those who were singing ceased at the same moment. The song paused; and I saw a company of six of the white-robed men walk up the centre of the human avenue, surrounding a youth gorgeously attired beneath his robe of white, and wearing a chaplet of flowers on his head. I followed them closely, with my keenest observation; and, by accompanying their slow progress with my eyes, I was able to perceive more clearly what took place when they arrived at the other end. I knew that my sight was so much more keen than that of most people, that I had good reason to suppose I should see more than the rest could, at such a distance. At the farther end, a throne stood upon a platform, high above the heads of the surrounding priests. To this platform I saw the company begin to ascend, apparently by an inclined plane of gentle slope. The throne itself was elevated again, on a kind of square pedestal, to the top of which led a flight of steps. On the throne sat a majestic-looking figure, whose posture seemed to indicate a mixture of pride and benignity, as he looked down on the multitude below. The company ascended to the foot of the throne, where they all kneeled for some minutes; then they rose and passed round to the side of the pedestal upon which the throne stood. Here they crowded close behind the youth, putting him in the foremost place; and one of them opened a door in the pedestal, for the youth to enter. I was sure I saw him shrink back, and those crowding behind push him in. Then, again, arose a burst of song from the multitude in white, which lasted some time. When it ceased, a new company of seven commenced its march up the centre. As they advanced, I looked up at my master: his noble countenance was full of reverence and awe. Incapable of evil himself, he could scarcely suspect it in another, much less in a multitude such as this, and surrounded with such appearances of solemnity. I was certain it was the really grand accompaniments that overcame him; that the stars overhead, the dark towering tops of the yew-trees, and the wind that, like an unseen spirit, sighed through their branches, bowed his spirit to the belief, that in all these ceremonies lay some great mystical meaning, which, his humility told him, his ignorance prevented him from understanding.

More convinced than before, that there was evil here, I could not endure that my master should be deceived; that one like him, so pure and noble, should respect what, if my suspicions were true, was worse than the ordinary deceptions of priestcraft. I could not tell how far he might be led to countenance, and otherwise support their doings, before he should find cause to repent bitterly of his error. I watched the new procession yet more keenly, if possible, than the former. This time, the central figure was a girl; and, and at the close, I observed, yet more indubitably, the shrinking back, and the crowding push. What happened to the victims, I never learned; but I had learned enough, and I could bear it no longer. I stooped, and whispered to the young girl who stood by me, to lend me her white garment. I wanted it, that I might not be entirely out of keeping with the solemnity, but might have at least this help to passing unquestioned. She looked up, half-amused and half-bewildered, as if doubting whether I was in earnest or not. But in her perplexity, she permitted me to unfasten it, and slip it down from her shoulders. I easily got possession of it; and, sinking down on my knees in the crowd, I rose apparently in the habit of one of the worshippers.

Giving my battle-axe to the girl, to hold in pledge for the return of her stole, for I wished to test the matter unarmed, and, if it was a man that sat upon the throne, to attack him with hands bare, as I supposed his must be, I made my way through the crowd to the front, while the singing yet continued, desirous of reaching the platform while it was unoccupied by any of the priests. I was permitted to walk up the long avenue of white robes unmolested, though I saw questioning looks in many of the faces as I passed. I presume my coolness aided my passage; for I felt quite indifferent as to my own fate; not feeling, after the late events of my history, that I was at all worth taking care of; and enjoying, perhaps, something of an evil satisfaction, in the revenge I was thus taking upon the self which had fooled me so long. When I arrived on the platform, the song had just ceased, and I felt as if all were looking towards me. But instead of kneeling at its foot, I walked right up the stairs to the throne, laid hold of a great wooden image that seemed to sit upon it, and tried to hurl it from its seat. In this I failed at first, for I found it firmly fixed. But in dread lest, the first shock of amazement passing away, the guards would rush upon me before I had effected my purpose, I strained with all my might; and, with a noise as of the cracking, and breaking, and tearing of rotten wood, something gave

way, and I hurled the image down the steps. Its displacement revealed a great hole in the throne, like the hollow of a decayed tree, going down apparently a great way. But I had no time to examine it, for, as I looked into it, up out of it rushed a great brute, like a wolf, but twice the size, and tumbled me headlong with itself, down the steps of the throne. As we fell, however, I caught it by the throat, and the moment we reached the platform, a struggle commenced, in which I soon got uppermost, with my hand upon its throat, and knee upon its heart. But now arose a wild cry of wrath and revenge and rescue. A universal hiss of steel, as every sword was swept from its scabbard, seemed to tear the very air in shreds. I heard the rush of hundreds towards the platform on which I knelt. I only tightened my grasp of the brute's throat. His eyes were already starting from his head, and his tongue was hanging out. My anxious hope was, that, even after they had killed me, they would be unable to undo my gripe of his throat, before the monster was past breathing. I therefore threw all my will, and force, and purpose, into the grasping hand. I remember no blow. A faintness came over me, and my consciousness departed.

CHAPTER 24

We are ne’er like angels till our passions die.

DECKAR

This wretched *Inn*, where we scarce stay to bait,
We call our *Dwelling-Place:*
We call one *Step* a *Race:*
But angels in their full enlightened state,
Angels, who *Live*, and know what ’tis to *Be*,
Who all the nonsense of our language see,
Who speak *things*, and our *words*, their ill-drawn *pictures*, scorn,
When we, by a foolish figure, say,
Behold an old man dead! then they
Speak properly, and cry, *Behold a man-child born!*

COWLEY

I was dead, and right content. I lay in my coffin, with my hands folded in peace. The knight, and the lady I loved, wept over me. Her tears fell on my face.

‘Ah!’ said the knight, ‘I rushed amongst them like a madman. I hewed them down like brushwood. Their swords battered on me like hail, but hurt me not. I cut a lane through to my friend. He was dead. But he had throttled the monster, and I had to cut the handful out of its throat, before I could disengage and carry off his body. They dared not molest me as I brought him back.’

‘He has died well,’ said the lady.

My spirit rejoiced. They left me to my repose. I felt as if a cool hand had been laid upon my heart, and had stilled it. My soul was like a summer evening, after a heavy fall of rain, when the drops are yet glistening on the trees in the last rays of the down-going sun, and the wind of the twilight has begun to blow. The hot fever of life had gone by, and I breathed the clear

mountain-air of the land of Death. I had never dreamed of such blessedness. It was not that I had in any way ceased to be what I had been. The very fact that anything can die, implies the existence of something that cannot die; which must either take to itself another form, as when the seed that is sown dies, and arises again; or, in conscious existence, may, perhaps, continue to lead a purely spiritual life. If my passions were dead, the souls of the passions, those essential mysteries of the spirit which had imbodied themselves in the passions, and had given to them all their glory and wonderment, yet lived, yet glowed, with a pure, undying fire. They rose above their vanishing earthly garments, and disclosed themselves angels of light. But oh, how beautiful beyond the old form! I lay thus for a time, and lived as it were an unradiating existence; my soul a motionless lake, that received all things and gave nothing back; satisfied in still contemplation, and spiritual consciousness.

Ere long, they bore me to my grave. Never tired child lay down in his white bed, and heard the sound of his playthings being laid aside for the night, with a more luxurious satisfaction of repose than I knew, when I felt the coffin settle on the firm earth, and heard the sound of the falling mould upon its lid. It has not the same hollow rattle within the coffin, that it sends up to the edge of the grave. They buried me in no graveyard. They loved me too much for that, I thank them; but they laid me in the grounds of their own castle, amid many trees; where, as it was spring-time, were growing primroses, and blue bells, and all the families of the woods.

Now that I lay in her bosom, the whole earth, and each of her many births, was as a body to me, at my will. I seemed to feel the great heart of the mother beating into mine, and feeding me with her own life, her own essential being and nature. I heard the footsteps of my friends above, and they sent a thrill through my heart. I knew that the helpers had gone, and that the knight and the lady remained, and spoke low, gentle, tearful words of him who lay beneath the yet wounded sod. I rose into a single large primrose that grew by the edge of the grave, and from the window of its humble, trusting face, looked full in the countenance of the lady. I felt that I could manifest myself in the primrose; that it said a part of what I wanted to say; just as in the old time, I had used to betake myself to a song for the same end. The flower caught her eye. She stooped and plucked it, saying, ‘Oh, you beautiful creature!’ and, lightly kissing it, put it in her bosom. It

was the first kiss she had ever given me. But the flower soon began to wither, and I forsook it.

It was evening. The sun was below the horizon; but his rosy beams yet illuminated a feathery cloud, that floated high above the world. I arose. I reached the cloud; and, throwing myself upon it, floated with it in sight of the sinking sun. He sank, and the cloud grew grey; but the greyness touched not my heart. It carried its rose-hue within; for now I could love without needing to be loved again. The moon came gliding up with all the past in her wan face. She changed my couch into a ghostly pallor, and threw all the earth below as to the bottom of a pale sea of dreams. But she could not make me sad. I knew now, that it is by loving, and not by being loved, that one can come nearest the soul of another; yea, that, where two love, it is the loving of each other, and not the being beloved by each other, that originates and perfects and assures their blessedness. I knew that love gives to him that loveth, power over any soul beloved, even if that soul know him not, bringing him inwardly close to that spirit; a power that cannot be but for good; for in proportion as selfishness intrudes, the love ceases, and the power which springs therefrom dies. Yet all love will, one day, meet with its return. All true love will, one day, behold its own image in the eyes of the beloved, and be humbly glad. This is possible in the realms of lofty Death. ‘Ah! my friends,’ thought I, ‘how I will tend you, and wait upon you, and haunt you with my love.’

My floating chariot bore me over a great city. Its faint dull sound steamed up into the air – a sound – how composed? ‘How many hopeless cries,’ thought I, ‘and how many mad shouts go to make up the tumult, here so faint where I float in eternal peace, knowing that they will one day be stilled in the surrounding calm, and that despair dies into infinite hope, and that the seeming impossible there, is the law here! But, O pale-faced women, and gloomy-browed men, and forgotten children, how I will wait on you, and minister to you, and, putting my arms about you in the dark, think hope unto your hearts, when you fancy no one is near! Soon as my senses have all come back, and have grown accustomed to this new blessed life, I will be among you, with the love that healeth.’

With this, a pang and a terrible shudder went through me; a writhing as of death convulsed me; and I became once again conscious of a more limited, even a bodily and earthly life.

CHAPTER 25

Unser Leben ist kein Traum, aber es soil und wird vielleicht einer werden

NOVALIS

Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will.

And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
I knocke with my staf, erlich and late,
And say to hire, Leve mother, let me in.

CHAUCER – *The Pardoneres Tale*

Sinking from such a state of ideal bliss, into the world of shadows which again closed around and infolded me, my first dread was, not unnaturally, that my own shadow had found me again, and that my torture had commenced anew. It was a sad revulsion of feeling. This, indeed, seemed to correspond to what we think death is, before we die. Yet I felt within me a power of calm endurance to which I had hitherto been a stranger. For, in truth, that I should be able if only to think such things as I had been thinking, was an unspeakable delight. An hour of such peace made the turmoil of a life-time worth striving through.

I found myself lying in the open air, in the early morning, before sunrise. Over me rose the summer heaven, expectant of the sun. The clouds already saw him, coming from afar; and soon every dewdrop would rejoice in his individual presence within it. I lay motionless for a few minutes; and then slowly rose and looked about me. I was on the summit of a little hill; a valley lay beneath, and a range of mountains closed up the view upon that side. But, to my horror, across the valley, and up the height of the opposing mountains, stretched, from my very feet, a hugely expanding shade. There it lay, long and large, dark and mighty. I turned away with a sick despair;

when, lo! I beheld the sun just lifting his head above the eastern hill, and the shadow that fell from me, lay only where his beams fell not. I danced for joy. It was only the natural shadow, that goes with every man who walks in the sun. As he arose, higher and higher, the shadow-head sank down the side of the opposite hill, and crept in across the valley towards my feet.

Now that I was so joyously delivered from this fear, I saw and recognised the country around me. In the valley below, lay my own castle, and the haunts of my childhood were all about me. I hastened home. My sisters received me with unspeakable joy; but I suppose they observed some change in me, for a kind of respect, with a slight touch of awe in it, mingled with their joy, and made me ashamed. They had been in great distress about me. On the morning of my disappearance, they had found the floor of my room flooded; and, all that day, a wondrous and nearly impervious mist had hung about the castle and grounds. I had been gone, they told me, twenty-one days. To me it seemed twenty-one years. Nor could I yet feel quite secure in my new experiences. When, at night, I lay down once more in my own bed, I did not feel at all sure that when I awoke, I should not find myself in some mysterious region of Fairy Land. My dreams were incessant and perturbed; but when I did awake, I saw clearly that I was in my own home.

My mind soon grew calm; and I began the duties of my new position, somewhat instructed, I hoped, by the adventures that had befallen me in Fairy Land. Could I translate the experience of my travels there, into common life? This was the question. Or must I live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men, whose experience yet runs parallel to that of Fairy Land? These questions I cannot yet answer. But I fear.

Even yet, I find myself looking round sometimes with anxiety, to see whether my shadow falls right away from the sun or no. I have never yet discovered any inclination to either side. And if I am not unfrequently sad, I yet cast no more of a shade on the earth, than most men who have lived in it as long as I. I have a strange feeling sometimes, that I am a ghost, sent into the world to minister to my fellow-men, or, rather, to repair the wrongs I have already done. May the world be brighter for me, at least in those portions of it, where my darkness falls not.

Thus I, who set out to find my Ideal, came back rejoicing that I had lost my Shadow.

When the thought of the blessedness I experienced, after my death in Fairy Land, is too high for me to lay hold upon it and hope in it, I often think of the wise woman in the cottage, and of her solemn assurance that she knew something too good to be told. When I am oppressed by any sorrow or real perplexity, I often feel as if I had only left her cottage for a time, and would soon return out of the vision, into it again. Sometimes, on such occasions, I find myself, unconsciously almost, looking about for the mystic mark of red, with the vague hope of entering her door, and being comforted by her wise tenderness. I then console myself by saying: 'I have come through the door of Dismay; and the way back from the world into which that has led me, is through my tomb. Upon that the red sign lies, and I shall find it one day, and be glad.'

I will end my story with the relation of an incident which befell me a few days ago. I had been with my reapers, and, when they ceased their work at noon, I had lain down under the shadow of a great, ancient beech-tree, that stood on the edge of the field. As I lay, with my eyes closed, I began to listen to the sound of the leaves overhead. At first, they made sweet inarticulate music alone; but, by and by, the sound seemed to begin to take shape, and to be gradually moulding itself into words; till, at last, I seemed able to distinguish these, half-dissolved in a little ocean of circumfluent tones: 'A great good is coming – is coming – is coming to thee, Anodos;' and so over and over again. I fancied that the sound reminded me of the voice of the ancient woman, in the cottage that was four-square. I opened my eyes, and, for a moment, almost believed that I saw her face, with its many wrinkles and its young eyes, looking at me from between two hoary branches of the beech overhead. But when I looked more keenly, I saw only twigs and leaves, and the infinite sky, in tiny spots, gazing through between. Yet I know that good is coming to me – that good is always coming; though few have at all times the simplicity and the courage to believe it. What we call evil, is the only and best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good. And so, *Farewell*.

THE END

Lilith

A ROMANCE

‘Off, Lilith!’

—*The Kabala*

I took a walk on Spaulding's Farm the other afternoon. I saw the setting sun lighting up the opposite side of a stately pine wood. Its golden rays straggled into the aisles of the wood as into some noble hall. I was impressed as if some ancient and altogether admirable and shining family had settled there in that part of the land called Concord, unknown to me, – to whom the sun was servant, – who had not gone into society in the village, – who had not been called on. I saw their park, their pleasure-ground, beyond through the wood, in Spaulding's cranberry-meadow. The pines furnished them with gables as they grew. Their house was not obvious to vision; their trees grew through it. I do not know whether I heard the sounds of a suppressed hilarity or not. They seemed to recline on the sunbeams. They have sons and daughters. They are quite well. The farmer's cartpath, which leads directly through their hall, does not in the least put them out, – as the muddy bottom of a pool is sometimes seen through the reflected skies. They never heard of Spaulding, and do not know that he is their neighbor, – notwithstanding I heard him whistle as he drove his team through the house. Nothing can equal the serenity of their lives. Their coat of arms is simply a lichen. I saw it painted on the pines and oaks. Their attics were in the tops of the trees. They are of no politics. There was no noise of labor. I did not perceive that they were weaving or spinning. Yet I did detect, when the wind lulled and hearing was done away, the finest imaginable sweet musical hum, – as of a distant hive in May, which perchance was the sound of their thinking. They had no idle thoughts, and no one without could see their work, for their industry was not as in knots and excrescences embayed.

But I find it difficult to remember them. They fade irrevocably out of my mind even now while I speak and endeavor to recall them, and recollect myself. It is only after a long and serious effort to recollect my best thoughts that I become again aware of their co-habitancy. If it were not for such families as this, I think I should move out of Concord.

THOREAU: 'Walking.'

CHAPTER 1

The Library

I had just finished my studies at Oxford, and was taking a brief holiday from work before assuming definitely the management of the estate. My father died when I was yet a child; my mother followed him within a year; and I was nearly as much alone in the world as a man might find himself.

I had made little acquaintance with the history of my ancestors. Almost the only thing I knew concerning them was, that a notable number of them had been given to study. I had myself so far inherited the tendency as to devote a good deal of my time, though, I confess, after a somewhat desultory fashion, to the physical sciences. It was chiefly the wonder they woke that drew me. I was constantly seeing, and on the outlook to see, strange analogies, not only between the facts of different sciences of the same order, or between physical and metaphysical facts, but between physical hypotheses and suggestions glimmering out of the metaphysical dreams into which I was in the habit of falling. I was at the same time much given to a premature indulgence of the impulse to turn hypothesis into theory. Of my mental peculiarities there is no occasion to say more.

The house as well as the family was of some antiquity, but no description of it is necessary to the understanding of my narrative. It contained a fine library, whose growth began before the invention of printing, and had continued to my own time, greatly influenced, of course, by changes of taste and pursuit. Nothing surely can more impress upon a man the transitory nature of possession than his succeeding to an ancient property!

Like a moving panorama mine has passed from before many eyes, and is now slowly flitting from before my own.

The library, although duly considered in many alterations of the house and additions to it, had nevertheless, like an encroaching state, absorbed one room after another until it occupied the greater part of the ground floor. Its chief room was large, and the walls of it were covered with books almost to the ceiling; the rooms into which it overflowed were of various sizes and shapes, and communicated in modes as various – by doors, by open arches, by short passages, by steps up and steps down.

In the great room I mainly spent my time, reading books of science, old as well as new; for the history of the human mind in relation to supposed knowledge was what most of all interested me. Ptolemy, Dante, the two Bacons, and Boyle were even more to me than Darwin or Maxwell, as so much nearer the vanished van breaking into the dark of ignorance.

In the evening of a gloomy day of August I was sitting in my usual place, my back to one of the windows, reading. It had rained the greater part of the morning and afternoon, but just as the sun was setting, the clouds parted in front of him, and he shone into the room. I rose and looked out of the window. In the centre of the great lawn the feathering top of the fountain column was filled with his red glory. I turned to resume my seat, when my eye was caught by the same glory on the one picture in the room – a portrait, in a sort of niche or little shrine sunk for it in the expanse of book-filled shelves. I knew it as the likeness of one of my ancestors, but had never even wondered why it hung there alone, and not in the gallery, or one of the great rooms, among the other family portraits. The direct sunlight brought out the painting wonderfully; for the first time I seemed to see it, and for the first time it seemed to respond to my look. With my eyes full of the light reflected from it, something, I cannot tell what, made me turn and cast a glance to the farther end of the room, when I saw, or seemed to see, a tall figure reaching up a hand to a bookshelf. The next instant, my vision apparently rectified by the comparative dusk, I saw no one, and concluded that my optic nerves had been momentarily affected from within.

I resumed my reading, and would doubtless have forgotten the vague, evanescent impression, had it not been that, having occasion a moment after to consult a certain volume, I found but a gap in the row where it ought to have stood, and the same instant remembered that just there I had seen, or

fancied I saw, the old man in search of a book. I looked all about the spot but in vain. The next morning, however, there it was, just where I had thought to find it! I knew of no one in the house likely to be interested in such a book

Three days after, another and yet odder thing took place.

In one of the walls was the low, narrow door of a closet, containing some of the oldest and rarest of the books. It was a very thick door, with a projecting frame, and it had been the fancy of some ancestor to cross it with shallow shelves, filled with book-backs only. The harmless trick may be excused by the fact that the titles on the sham backs were either humorously original, or those of books lost beyond hope of recovery. I had a great liking for the masked door

To complete the illusion of it, some inventive workman apparently had shoved in, on the top of one of the rows, a part of a volume thin enough to lie between it and the bottom of the next shelf: he had cut away diagonally a considerable portion, and fixed the remnant with one of its open corners projecting beyond the book-backs. The binding of the mutilated volume was limp vellum, and one could open the corner far enough to see that it was manuscript upon parchment.

Happening, as I sat reading, to raise my eyes from the page, my glance fell upon this door, and at once I saw that the book described, if book it may be called, was gone. Angrier than any worth I knew in it justified, I rang the bell, and the butler appeared. When I asked him if he knew what had befallen it, he turned pale, and assured me he did not. I could less easily doubt his word than my own eyes, for he had been all his life in the family, and a more faithful servant never lived. He left on me the impression, nevertheless, that he could have said something more.

In the afternoon I was again reading in the library, and coming to a point which demanded reflection, I lowered the book and let my eyes go wandering. The same moment I saw the back of a slender old man, in a long, dark coat, shiny as from much wear, in the act of disappearing through the masked door into the closet beyond. I darted across the room, found the door shut, pulled it open, looked into the closet, which had no other issue, and, seeing nobody, concluded, not without uneasiness, that I had had a recurrence of my former illusion, and sat down again to my reading.

Naturally, however, I could not help feeling a little nervous, and presently glancing up to assure myself that I was indeed alone, started again to my feet, and ran to the masked door – for there was the mutilated volume in its place! I laid hold of it and pulled: it was firmly fixed as usual!

I was now utterly bewildered. I rang the bell; the butler came; I told him all I had seen, and he told me all he knew.

He had hoped, he said, that the old gentleman was going to be forgotten; it was well no one but myself had seen him. He had heard a good deal about him when first he served in the house, but by degrees he had ceased to be mentioned, and he had been very careful not to allude to him.

'The place was haunted by an old gentleman, was it?' I said.

He answered that at one time everybody believed it, but the fact that I had never heard of it seemed to imply that the thing had come to an end and was forgotten.

I questioned him as to what he had seen of the old gentleman.

He had never seen him, he said, although he had been in the house from the day my father was eight years old. My grandfather would never hear a word on the matter, declaring that whoever alluded to it should be dismissed without a moment's warning: it was nothing but a pretext of the maids, he said, for running into the arms of the men! but old Sir Ralph believed in nothing he could not see or lay hold of. Not one of the maids ever said she had seen the apparition, but a footman had left the place because of it.

An ancient woman in the village had told him a legend concerning a Mr Raven, long time librarian to 'that Sir Upward whose portrait hangs there among the books.' Sir Upward was a great reader, she said – not of such books only as were wholesome for men to read, but of strange, forbidden, and evil books; and in so doing, Mr Raven, who was probably the devil himself, encouraged him. Suddenly they both disappeared, and Sir Upward was never after seen or heard of, but Mr Raven continued to show himself at uncertain intervals in the library. There were some who believed he was not dead; but both he and the old woman held it easier to believe that a dead man might revisit the world he had left, than that one who went on living for hundreds of years should be a man at all.

He had never heard that Mr Raven meddled with anything in the house, but he might perhaps consider himself privileged in regard to the books.

How the old woman had learned so much about him he could not tell; but the description she gave of him corresponded exactly with the figure I had just seen.

‘I hope it was but a friendly call on the part of the old gentleman!’ he concluded, with a troubled smile.

I told him I had no objection to any number of visits from Mr Raven, but it would be well he should keep to his resolution of saying nothing about him to the servants. Then I asked him if he had ever seen the mutilated volume out of its place; he answered that he never had, and had always thought it a fixture. With that he went to it, and gave it a pull: it seemed immovable.

CHAPTER 2

The Mirror

Nothing more happened for some days. I think it was about a week after, when what I have now to tell took place.

I had often thought of the manuscript fragment, and repeatedly tried to discover some way of releasing it, but in vain: I could not find what held it fast.

But I had for some time intended a thorough overhauling of the books in the closet, its atmosphere causing me uneasiness as to their condition. One day the intention suddenly became a resolve, and I was in the act of rising from my chair to make a beginning, when I saw the old librarian moving from the door of the closet toward the farther end of the room. I ought rather to say only that I caught sight of something shadowy from which I received the impression of a slight, stooping man, in a shabby dress-coat reaching almost to his heels, the tails of which, disparting a little as he walked, revealed thin legs in black stockings, and large feet in wide, slipper-like shoes.

At once I followed him: I might be following a shadow, but I never doubted I was following something. He went out of the library into the hall, and across to the foot of the great staircase, then up the stairs to the first floor, where lay the chief rooms. Past these rooms, I following close, he continued his way, through a wide corridor, to the foot of a narrower stair leading to the second floor. Up that he went also, and when I reached the top, strange as it may seem, I found myself in a region almost unknown to me. I never had brother or sister to incite to such romps as make children

familiar with nook and cranny; I was a mere child when my guardian took me away; and I had never seen the house again until, about a month before, I returned to take possession.

Through passage after passage we came to a door at the bottom of a winding wooden stair, which we ascended. Every step creaked under my foot, but I heard no sound from that of my guide. Somewhere in the middle of the stair I lost sight of him, and from the top of it the shadowy shape was nowhere visible. I could not even imagine I saw him. The place was full of shadows, but he was not one of them.

I was in the main garret, with huge beams and rafters over my head, great spaces around me, a door here and there in sight, and long vistas whose gloom was thinned by a few lurking cob-webbed windows and small dusky skylights. I gazed with a strange mingling of awe and pleasure: the wide expanse of garret was my own, and unexplored!

In the middle of it stood an unpainted inclosure of rough planks, the door of which was ajar. Thinking Mr Raven might be there, I pushed the door, and entered.

The small chamber was full of light, but such as dwells in places deserted: it had a dull, disconsolate look, as if it found itself of no use, and regretted having come. A few rather dim sunrays, marking their track through the cloud of motes that had just been stirred up, fell upon a tall mirror with a dusty face, old-fashioned and rather narrow – in appearance an ordinary glass. It had an ebony frame, on the top of which stood a black eagle with outstretched wings, in his beak a golden chain, from whose end hung a black ball.

I had been looking at rather than into the mirror, when suddenly I became aware that it reflected neither the chamber nor my own person. I have an impression of having seen the wall melt away, but what followed is enough to account for any uncertainty: – could I have mistaken for a mirror the glass that protected a wonderful picture?

I saw before me a wild country, broken and heathy. Desolate hills of no great height, but somehow of strange appearance, occupied the middle distance; along the horizon stretched the tops of a far-off mountain range; nearest me lay a tract of moorland flat and melancholy.

Being short-sighted, I stepped closer to examine the texture of a stone in the immediate foreground, and in the act espied, hopping toward me with

solemnity, a large and ancient raven, whose purply black was here and there softened with gray. He seemed looking for worms as he came. Nowise astonished at the appearance of a live creature in a picture, I took another step forward to see him better, stumbled over something – doubtless the frame of the mirror – and stood nose to beak with the bird: I was in the open air, on a houseless heath!

CHAPTER 3

The Raven

I turned and looked behind me: all was vague and uncertain, as when one cannot distinguish between fog and field, between cloud and mountain-side. One fact only was plain – that I saw nothing I knew. Imagining myself involved in a visual illusion, and that touch would correct sight, I stretched my arms and felt about me, walking in this direction and that, if haply, where I could see nothing, I might yet come in contact with something; but my search was vain. Instinctively then, as to the only living thing near me, I turned to the raven, which stood a little way off, regarding me with an expression at once respectful and quizzical. Then the absurdity of seeking counsel from such a one struck me, and I turned again, overwhelmed with bewilderment, not unmingled with fear. Had I wandered into a region where both the material and psychical relations of our world had ceased to hold? Might a man at any moment step beyond the realm of order, and become the sport of the lawless? Yet I saw the raven, felt the ground under my feet, and heard a sound as of wind in the lowly plants around me!

'How *did* I get here?' I said – apparently aloud, for the question was immediately answered.

'You came through the door,' replied an odd, rather harsh voice.

I looked behind, then all about me, but saw no human shape. The terror that madness might be at hand laid hold upon me: must I henceforth place no confidence either in my senses or my consciousness? The same instant I knew it was the raven that had spoken, for he stood looking up at me with

an air of waiting. The sun was not shining, yet the bird seemed to cast a shadow, and the shadow seemed part of himself.

I beg my reader to aid me in the endeavour to make myself intelligible – if here understanding be indeed possible between us. I was in a world, or call it a state of things, an economy of conditions, an idea of existence, so little correspondent with the ways and modes of this world – which we are apt to think the only world, that the best choice I can make of word or phrase is but an adumbration of what I would convey. I begin indeed to fear that I have undertaken an impossibility, undertaken to tell what I cannot tell because no speech at my command will fit the forms in my mind. Already I have set down statements I would gladly change did I know how to substitute a truer utterance; but as often as I try to fit the reality with nearer words, I find myself in danger of losing the things themselves, and feel like one in process of awaking from a dream, with the thing that seemed familiar gradually yet swiftly changing through a succession of forms until its very nature is no longer recognisable.

I bethought me that a bird capable of addressing a man must have the right of a man to a civil answer; perhaps, as a bird, even a greater claim.

A tendency to croak caused a certain roughness in his speech, but his voice was not disagreeable, and what he said, although conveying little enlightenment, did not sound rude.

‘I did not come through any door,’ I rejoined.

‘I saw you come through it! – saw you with my own ancient eyes!’ asserted the raven, positively but not disrespectfully.

‘I never saw any door!’ I persisted.

‘Of course not!’ he returned; ‘all the doors you had yet seen – and you haven’t seen many – were doors in; here you came upon a door out! The strange thing to you,’ he went on thoughtfully, ‘will be, that the more doors you go out of, the farther you get in!’

‘Oblige me by telling me where I am.’

‘That is impossible. You know nothing about whereness. The only way to come to know where you are is to begin to make yourself at home.’

‘How am I to begin that where everything is so strange?’

‘By doing something.’

‘What?’

‘Anything; and the sooner you begin the better! for until you are at home, you will find it as difficult to get out as it is to get in.’

‘I have, unfortunately, found it too easy to get in; once out I shall not try again!’

‘You have stumbled in, and may, possibly, stumble out again. Whether you have got in *unfortunately* remains to be seen.’

‘Do you never go out, sir?’

‘When I please I do, but not often, or for long. Your world is such a half-baked sort of place, it is at once so childish and so self-satisfied – in fact, it is not sufficiently developed for an old raven – at your service!’

‘Am I wrong, then, in presuming that a man is superior to a bird?’

‘That is as it may be. We do not waste our intellects in generalising, but take man or bird as we find him. – I think it is now my turn to ask you a question!’

‘You have the best of rights,’ I replied, ‘in the fact that you *can* do so!’

‘Well answered!’ he rejoined. ‘Tell me, then, who you are – if you happen to know.’

‘How should I help knowing? I am myself, and must know!’

‘If you know you are yourself, you know that you are not somebody else; but do you know that you are yourself? Are you sure you are not your own father? – or, excuse me, your own fool? – Who are you, pray?’

I became at once aware that I could give him no notion of who I was. Indeed, who was I? It would be no answer to say I was who! Then I understood that I did not know myself, did not know what I was, had no grounds on which to determine that I was one and not another. As for the name I went by in my own world, I had forgotten it, and did not care to recall it, for it meant nothing, and what it might be was plainly of no consequence here. I had indeed almost forgotten that there it was a custom for everybody to have a name! So I held my peace, and it was my wisdom; for what should I say to a creature such as this raven, who saw through accident into entity?

‘Look at me,’ he said, ‘and tell me who I am.’

As he spoke, he turned his back, and instantly I knew him. He was no longer a raven, but a man above the middle height with a stoop, very thin, and wearing a long black tailcoat. Again he turned, and I saw him a raven.

‘I have seen you before, sir,’ I said, feeling foolish rather than surprised.

‘How can you say so from seeing me behind?’ he rejoined. ‘Did you ever see yourself behind? You have never seen yourself at all! – Tell me now, then, who I am.’

‘I humbly beg your pardon,’ I answered: ‘I believe you were once the librarian of our house, but more *who* I do not know.’

‘Why do you beg my pardon?’

‘Because I took you for a raven,’ I said – seeing him before me as plainly a raven as bird or man could look.

‘You did me no wrong,’ he returned. ‘Calling me a raven, or thinking me one, you allowed me existence, which is the sum of what one can demand of his fellow beings. Therefore, in return, I will give you a lesson: – No one can say he is himself, until first he knows that he *is*, and then what *himself* is. In fact, nobody is himself, and himself is nobody. There is more in it than you can see now, but not more than you need to see. You have, I fear, got into this region too soon, but none the less you must get to be at home in it; for home, as you may or may not know, is the only place where you can go out and into. There are places you can go into, and places you can go out of; but the one place, if you do but find it, where you may go out and in both, is home.’

He turned to walk away, and again I saw the librarian. He did not appear to have changed, only to have taken up his shadow. I know this seems nonsense, but I cannot help it.

I gazed after him until I saw him no more; but whether distance hid him, or he disappeared among the heather, I cannot tell.

Could it be that I was dead, I thought, and did not know it? Was I in what we used to call the world beyond the grave? and must I wander about seeking my place in it? How was I to find myself at home? The raven said I must do something: what could I do here? – And would that make me somebody? for now, alas, I was nobody!

I took the way Mr Raven had gone, and went slowly after him. Presently I saw a wood of tall slender pine-trees, and turned towards it. The odour of it met me on my way, and I made haste to bury myself in it.

Plunged at length in its twilight glooms, I spied before me something with a shine, standing between two of the stems. It had no colour, but was like the translucent trembling of the hot air that rises, in a radiant summer noon, from the sun-baked ground, vibrant like the smitten chords of a

musical instrument. What it was grew no plainer as I went nearer, and when I came close up, I ceased to see it, only the form and colour of the trees beyond seemed strangely uncertain. I would have passed between the stems, but received a slight shock, stumbled, and fell. When I rose, I saw before me the wooden wall of the garret chamber. I turned, and there was the mirror, on whose top the black eagle seemed but that moment to have perched.

Terror seized me, and I fled. Outside the chamber the wide garret spaces had an *uncanny* look. They seemed to have long been waiting for something; it had come, and they were waiting again! A shudder went through me on the winding stair: the house had grown strange to me! something was about to leap upon me from behind! I darted down the spiral, struck against the wall and fell, rose and ran. On the next floor I lost my way, and had gone through several passages a second time ere I found the head of the stair. At the top of the great stair I had come to myself a little, and in a few moments I sat recovering my breath in the library.

Nothing should ever again make me go up that last terrible stair! The garret at the top of it pervaded the whole house! It sat upon it, threatening to crush me out of it! The brooding brain of the building, it was full of mysterious dwellers, one or other of whom might any moment appear in the library where I sat! I was nowhere safe! I would let, I would sell the dreadful place, in which an aërial portal stood ever open to creatures whose life was other than human! I would purchase a crag in Switzerland, and thereon build a wooden nest of one story with never a garret above it, guarded by some grand old peak that would send down nothing worse than a few tons of whelming rock!

I knew all the time that my thinking was foolish, and was even aware of a certain undertone of contemptuous humour in it; but suddenly it was checked, and I seemed again to hear the croak of the raven.

‘If I know nothing of my own garret,’ I thought, ‘what is there to secure me against my own brain? Can I tell what it is even now generating? – what thought it may present me the next moment, the next month, or a year away? What is at the heart of my brain? What is behind my *think*? Am *I* there at all? – Who, what am I?’

I could no more answer the question now than when the raven put it to me in – at – ‘Where in? – where at?’ I said, and gave myself up as knowing

anything of myself or the universe.

I started to my feet, hurried across the room to the masked door, where the mutilated volume, sticking out from the flat of soulless, bodiless, non-existent books, appeared to beckon me, went down on my knees, and opened it as far as its position would permit, but could see nothing. I got up again, lighted a taper, and peeping as into a pair of reluctant jaws, perceived that the manuscript was verse. Further I could not carry discovery. Beginnings of lines were visible on the left-hand page, and ends of lines on the other; but I could not, of course, get at the beginning and end of a single line, and was unable, in what I could read, to make any guess at the sense. The mere words, however, woke in me feelings which to describe was, from their strangeness, impossible. Some dreams, some poems, some musical phrases, some pictures, wake feelings such as one never had before, new in colour and form – spiritual sensations, as it were, hitherto unproved: here, some of the phrases, some of the senseless half-lines, some even of the individual words affected me in similar fashion – as with the aroma of an idea, rousing in me a great longing to know what the poem or poems might, even yet in their multilation, hold or suggest.

I copied out a few of the larger shreds attainable, and tried hard to complete some of the lines, but without the least success. The only thing I gained in the effort was so much weariness that, when I went to bed, I fell asleep at once and slept soundly.

In the morning all that horror of the empty garret spaces had left me.

CHAPTER 4

Somewhere or Nowhere?

The sun was very bright, but I doubted if the day would long be fine, and looked into the milky sapphire I wore, to see whether the star in it was clear. It was even less defined than I had expected. I rose from the breakfast-table, and went to the window to glance at the stone again. There had been heavy rain in the night, and on the lawn was a thrush breaking his way into the shell of a snail.

As I was turning my ring about to catch the response of the star to the sun, I spied a keen black eye gazing at me out of the milky misty blue. The sight startled me so that I dropped the ring, and when I picked it up the eye was gone from it. The same moment the sun was obscured; a dark vapour covered him, and in a minute or two the whole sky was clouded. The air had grown sultry, and a gust of wind came suddenly. A moment more and there was a flash of lightning, with a single sharp thunder-clap. Then the rain fell in torrents.

I had opened the window, and stood there looking out at the precipitous rain, when I descried a raven walking toward me over the grass, with solemn gait, and utter disregard of the falling deluge. Suspecting who he was, I congratulated myself that I was safe on the ground-floor. At the same time I had a conviction that, if I were not careful, something would happen.

He came nearer and nearer, made a profound bow, and with a sudden winged leap stood on the window sill. Then he stepped over the ledge, jumped down into the room, and walked to the door. I thought he was on his way to the library, and followed him, determined, if he went up the stair, not

to take one step after him. He turned, however, neither toward the library nor the stair, but to a little door that gave upon a grass-patch in a nook between two portions of the rambling old house. I made haste to open it for him. He stepped out into its creeper-covered porch, and stood looking at the rain, which fell like a huge thin cataract; I stood in the door behind him. The second flash came, and was followed by a lengthened roll of more distant thunder. He turned his head over his shoulder and looked at me, as much as to say, 'You hear that?' then swivelled it round again, and anew contemplated the weather, apparently with approbation. So human were his pose and carriage and the way he kept turning his head, that I remarked almost involuntarily,

'Fine weather for the worms, Mr Raven!'

'Yes,' he answered, in the rather croaky voice I had learned to know, 'the ground will be nice for them to get out and in! – It must be a grand time on the steppes of Uranus!' he added, with a glance upward; 'I believe it is raining there too; it was, all the last week!'

'Why should that make a grand time?' I asked.

'Because the animals there are all burrowers,' he answered, '—like the field-mice and the moles here. – They will be, for ages to come.'

'How do you know that, if I may be so bold?' I rejoined.

'As any one would who had been there to see,' he replied. 'It is a great sight, until you get used to it, when the earth gives a heave, and out comes a beast. You might think it a hairy elephant or a deinotherium – but none of the animals are the same as we have ever had here. I was almost frightened myself the first time I saw the dry-bog-serpent come wallowing out – such a head and mane! and *such* eyes! – but the shower is nearly over. It will stop directly after the next thunder-clap. There it is!'

A flash came with the words, and in about half a minute the thunder. Then the rain ceased.

'Now we should be going!' said the raven, and stepped to the front of the porch.

'Going where?' I asked.

'Going where we have to go,' he answered. 'You did not surely think you had got home? I told you there was no going out and in at pleasure until you were at home!'

'I do not want to go,' I said.

‘That does not make any difference – at least not much,’ he answered. ‘This is the way!’

‘I am quite content where I am.’

‘You think so, but you are not. Come along.’

He hopped from the porch on the grass, and turned, waiting.

‘I will not leave the house to-day,’ I said with obstinacy.

‘You will come into the garden!’ rejoined the raven.

‘I give in so far,’ I replied, and stepped from the porch.

The sun broke through the clouds, and the raindrops flashed and sparkled on the grass. The raven was walking over it.

‘You will wet your feet!’ I cried.

‘And mire my beak,’ he answered, immediately plunging it deep in the sod, and drawing out a great wriggling red worm. He threw back his head, and tossed it in the air. It spread great wings, gorgeous in red and black, and soared aloft.

‘Tut! tut!’ I exclaimed; ‘you mistake, Mr Raven: worms are not the larvae of butterflies!’

‘Never mind,’ he croaked; ‘it will do for once! I’m not a reading man at present, but sexton at the – at a certain graveyard – cemetery, more properly – in – at – no matter where!’

‘I see! you can’t keep your spade still: and when you have nothing to bury, you must dig something up! Only you should mind what it is before you make it fly! No creature should be allowed to forget what and where it came from!’

‘Why?’ said the raven.

‘Because it will grow proud, and cease to recognise its superiors.’

No man knows it when he is making an idiot of himself.

‘Where *do* the worms come from?’ said the raven, as if suddenly grown curious to know.

‘Why, from the earth, as you have just seen!’ I answered.

‘Yes, last!’ he replied. ‘But they can’t have come from it first – for that will never go back to it!’ he added, looking up.

I looked up also, but could see nothing save a little dark cloud, the edges of which were red, as if with the light of the sunset.

‘Surely the sun is not going down!’ I exclaimed, struck with amazement.

‘Oh, no!’ returned the raven. ‘That red belongs to the worm.’

‘You see what comes of making creatures forget their origin!’ I cried with some warmth.

‘It is well, surely, if it be to rise higher and grow larger!’ he returned. ‘But indeed I only teach them to find it!’

‘Would you have the air full of worms?’

‘That is the business of a sexton. If only the rest of the clergy understood it as well!’

In went his beak again through the soft turf, and out came the wriggling worm. He tossed it in the air, and away it flew.

I looked behind me, and gave a cry of dismay: I had but that moment declared I would not leave the house, and already I was a stranger in the strange land!

‘What right have you to treat me so, Mr Raven?’ I said with deep offence. ‘Am I, or am I not, a free agent?’

‘A man is as free as he chooses to make himself, never an atom freer,’ answered the raven.

‘You have no right to make me do things against my will!’

‘When you have a will, you will find that no one can.’

‘You wrong me in the very essence of my individuality!’ I persisted.

‘If you were an individual I could not, therefore now I do not. You are but beginning to become an individual.’

All about me was a pine-forest, in which my eyes were already searching deep, in the hope of discovering an unaccountable glimmer, and so finding my way home. But, alas! how could I any longer call that house *home*, where every door, every window opened into – *Out*, and even the garden I could not keep inside!

I suppose I looked discomfited.

‘Perhaps it may comfort you,’ said the raven, ‘to be told that you have not yet left your house, neither has your house left you. At the same time it cannot contain you, or you inhabit it!’

‘I do not understand you,’ I replied. ‘Where am I?’

‘In the region of the seven dimensions,’ he answered, with a curious noise in his throat, and a flutter of his tail. ‘You had better follow me carefully now for a moment, lest you should hurt some one!’

‘There is nobody to hurt but yourself, Mr Raven! I confess I should rather like to hurt you!’

‘That you see nobody is where the danger lies. But you see that large tree to your left, about thirty yards away?’

‘Of course I do: why should I not?’ I answered testily.

‘Ten minutes ago you did not see it, and now you do not know where it stands!’

‘I do.’

‘Where do you think it stands?’

‘Why *there*, where you know it is!’

‘Where is *there*?’

‘You bother me with your silly questions!’ I cried. ‘I am growing tired of you!’

‘That tree stands on the hearth of your kitchen, and grows nearly straight up its chimney,’ he said.

‘Now I *know* you are making game of me!’ I answered, with a laugh of scorn.

‘Was I making game of you when you discovered me looking out of your star-sapphire yesterday?’

‘That was this morning – not an hour ago!’

‘I have been widening your horizon longer than that, Mr Vane; but never mind!’

‘You mean you have been making a fool of me!’ I said, turning from him.

‘Excuse me: no one can do that but yourself!’

‘And I decline to do it.’

‘You mistake.’

‘How?’

‘In declining to acknowledge yourself one already. You make yourself such by refusing what is true, and for that you will sorely punish yourself.’

‘How, again?’

‘By believing what is not true.’

‘Then, if I walk to the other side of that tree, I shall walk through the kitchen fire?’

‘Certainly. You would first, however, walk through the lady at the piano in the breakfast-room. That rosebush is close by her. You would give her a terrible start!’

‘There is no lady in the house!’

‘Indeed! Is not your housekeeper a lady? She is counted such in a certain country where all are servants, and the liveries one and multitudinous!’

‘She cannot use the piano, anyhow!’

‘Her niece can: she is there – a well-educated girl and a capital musician.’

‘Excuse me, I cannot help it: you seem to me to be talking sheer nonsense!’

‘If you could but hear the music! Those great long heads of wild hyacinth are inside the piano, among the strings of it, and give that peculiar sweetness to her playing! – Pardon me: I forgot your deafness!’

‘Two objects,’ I said, ‘cannot exist in the same place at the same time!’

‘Can they not? I did not know! – I remember now they do teach that with you. It is a great mistake – one of the greatest ever wiseacre made! No man of the universe, only a man of the world could have said so!’

‘You a librarian, and talk such rubbish!’ I cried. ‘Plainly, you did not read many of the books in your charge!’

‘Oh, yes! I went through all in your library – at the time, and came out at the other side not much the wiser. I was a bookworm then, but when I came to know it, I awoke among the butterflies. To be sure I have given up reading for a good many years – ever since I was made sexton. – There! I smell Grieg’s *Wedding March* in the quiver of those rose-petals!’

I went to the rose-bush and listened hard, but could not hear the thinnest ghost of a sound; I only smelt something I had never before smelt in any rose. It was still rose-odour, but with a difference, caused, I suppose, by the *Wedding March*.

When I looked up, there was the bird by my side.

‘Mr Raven,’ I said, ‘forgive me for being so rude: I was irritated. Will you kindly show me my way home? I must go, for I have an appointment with my bailiff. One must not break faith with his servants!’

‘You cannot break what was broken days ago!’ he answered.

‘Do show me the way,’ I pleaded.

‘I cannot,’ he returned. ‘To go back, you must go through yourself, and that way no man can show another.’

Entreaty was vain. I must accept my fate! But how was life to be lived in a world of which I had all the laws to learn? There would, however, be

adventure! that held consolation; and whether I found my way home or not, I should at least have the rare advantage of knowing two worlds!

I had never yet done anything to justify my existence; my former world was nothing the better for my sojourn in it: here, however, I must earn, or in some way find, my bread! But I reasoned that, as I was not to blame in being here, I might expect to be taken care of here as well as there! I had had nothing to do with getting into the world I had just left, and in it I had found myself heir to a large property! If that world, as I now saw, had a claim upon me because I had eaten, and could eat again, upon this world I had a claim because I must eat – when it would in return have a claim on me!

'There is no hurry,' said the raven, who stood regarding me; 'we do not go much by the clock here. Still, the sooner one begins to do what has to be done, the better! I will take you to my wife.'

'Thank you. Let us go!' I answered, and immediately he led the way.

CHAPTER 5

The Old Church

I followed him deep into the pine-forest. Neither of us said much while yet the sacred gloom of it closed us round. We came to larger and yet larger trees – older, and more individual, some of them grotesque with age. Then the forest grew thinner.

'You see that hawthorn?' said my guide at length, pointing with his beak.

I looked where the wood melted away on the edge of an open heath.

'I see a gnarled old man, with a great white head,' I answered.

'Look again,' he rejoined: 'it is a hawthorn.'

'It seems indeed an ancient hawthorn, but this is not the season for the hawthorn to blossom!' I objected.

'The season for the hawthorn to blossom,' he replied, 'is when the hawthorn blossoms. That tree is in the ruins of the church on your home-farm. You were going to give some directions to the bailiff about its churchyard, were you not, the morning of the thunder?'

'I was going to tell him I wanted it turned into a wilderness of rose-trees, and that the plough must never come within three yards of it.'

'Listen!' said the raven, seeming to hold his breath.

I listened, and heard – was it the sighing of a far-off musical wind – or the ghost of a music that had once been glad? Or did I indeed hear anything?

'They go there still,' said the raven.

'Who goes there? and where do they go?' I asked.

‘Some of the people who used to pray there, go to the ruins still,’ he replied. ‘But they will not go much longer, I think.’

‘What makes them go now?’

‘They need help from each other to get their thinking done, and their feelings hatched, so they talk and sing together; and then, they say, the big thought floats out of their hearts like a great ship out of the river at high water.’

‘Do they pray as well as sing?’

‘No, they have found that each can best pray in his own silent heart. – Some people are always at their prayers. – Look! look! There goes one!’

He pointed right up into the air. A snow-white pigeon was mounting, with quick and yet quicker wing-flap, the unseen spiral of an ethereal stair. The sunshine flashed quivering from its wings.

‘I see a pigeon!’ I said.

‘Of course you see a pigeon,’ rejoined the raven, ‘for there is the pigeon! *I* see a prayer on its way. – I wonder now what heart is that dove’s mother! Some one may have come awake in my cemetery!’

‘How can a pigeon be a prayer?’ I said. ‘I understand, of course, how it should be a fit symbol or likeness for one; but a live pigeon to come out of a heart!’

‘It *must* puzzle you! It cannot fail to do so!’

‘A prayer is a thought, a thing spiritual!’ I pursued.

‘Very true! But if you understood any world besides your own, you would understand your own much better. – When a heart is really alive, then it is able to think live things. There is one heart all whose thoughts are strong, happy creatures, and whose very dreams are lives. When some pray, they lift heavy thoughts from the ground, only to drop them on it again; others send up their prayers in living shapes, this or that, the nearest likeness to each. All live things were thoughts to begin with, and are fit therefore to be used by those that think. When one says to the great Thinker: – “Here is one of thy thoughts: I am thinking it now!” that is a prayer – a word to the big heart from one of its own little hearts. – Look, there is another!’

This time the raven pointed his beak downward – to something at the foot of a block of granite. I looked, and saw a little flower. I had never seen one like it before, and cannot utter the feeling it woke in me by its gracious,

trusting form, its colour, and its odour as of a new world that was yet the old. I can only say that it suggested an anemone, was of a pale rose-hue, and had a golden heart.

‘That is a prayer-flower,’ said the raven.

‘I never saw such a flower before!’ I rejoined.

‘There is no other such. Not one prayer-flower is ever quite like another,’ he returned.

‘How do you know it a prayer-flower?’ I asked.

‘By the expression of it,’ he answered. ‘More than that I cannot tell you. If you know it, you know it; if you do not, you do not.’

‘Could you not teach me to know a prayer-flower when I see it?’ I said.

‘I could not. But if I could, what better would you be? you would not know it of *your*self and *it*self! Why know the name of a thing when the thing itself you do not know? Whose work is it but your own to open your eyes? But indeed the business of the universe is to make such a fool of you that you will know yourself for one, and so begin to be wise!’

But I did see that the flower was different from any flower I had ever seen before; therefore I knew that I must be seeing a shadow of the prayer in it; and a great awe came over me to think of the heart listening to the flower.

CHAPTER 6

The Sexton’s Cottage

We had been for some time walking over a rocky moorland covered with dry plants and mosses, when I descried a little cottage in the farthest distance. The sun was not yet down, but he was wrapt in a gray cloud. The heath looked as if it had never been warm, and the wind blew strangely cold, as if from some region where it was always night.

‘Here we are at last!’ said the raven. ‘What a long way it is! In half the time I could have gone to Paradise and seen my cousin – him, you remember, who never came back to Noah! Dear! dear! it is almost winter!’

‘Winter!’ I cried; ‘it seems but half a day since we left home!’

‘That is because we have travelled so fast,’ answered the raven. ‘In your world you cannot pull up the plumb-line you call gravitation, and let the world spin round under your feet! But here is my wife’s house! She is very good to let me live with her, and call it the sexton’s cottage!’

‘But where is your churchyard – your cemetery – where you make your graves, I mean?’ said I, seeing nothing but the flat heath.

The raven stretched his neck, held out his beak horizontally, turned it slowly round to all points of the compass, and said nothing.

I followed the beak with my eyes, and lo, without church or graves, all was a churchyard! Wherever the dreary wind swept, there was the raven’s cemetery! He was sexton of all he surveyed! lord of all that was laid aside! I stood in the burial-ground of the universe; its compass the unenclosed heath, its wall the gray horizon, low and starless! I had left spring and summer, autumn and sunshine behind me, and come to the winter that

waited for me! I had set out in the prime of my youth, and here I was already! – But I mistook. The day might well be long in that region, for it contained the seasons. Winter slept there, the night through, in his winding-sheet of ice; with childlike smile, Spring came awake in the dawn; at noon, Summer blazed abroad in her gorgeous beauty; with the slow-changing afternoon, old Autumn crept in, and died at the first breath of the vaporous, ghosty night.

As we drew near the cottage, the clouded sun was rushing down the steepest slope of the west, and he sank while we were yet a few yards from the door. The same instant I was assailed by a cold that seemed almost a material presence, and I struggled across the threshold as if from the clutches of an icy death. A wind swelled up on the moor, and rushed at the door as with difficulty I closed it behind me. Then all was still, and I looked about me.

A candle burned on a deal table in the middle of the room, and the first thing I saw was the lid of a coffin, as I thought, set up against the wall; but it opened, for it was a door, and a woman entered. She was all in white – as white as new-fallen snow; and her face was as white as her dress, but not like snow, for at once it suggested warmth. I thought her features were perfect, but her eyes made me forget them. The life of her face and her whole person was gathered and concentrated in her eyes, where it became light. It might have been coming death that made her face luminous, but the eyes had life in them for a nation – large, and dark with a darkness ever deepening as I gazed. A whole night-heaven lay condensed in each pupil, all the stars were in its blackness, and flashed; while round it for a horizon lay coiled an iris of the eternal twilight. What any eye *is*, God only knows: her eyes must have been coming direct out of his own! the still face might be a primeval perfection; the live eyes were a continuous creation.

‘Here is Mr Vane, wife!’ said the raven.

‘He is welcome,’ she answered, in a low, rich, gentle voice. Treasures of immortal sound seemed to lie buried in it.

I gazed, and could not speak.

‘I knew you would be glad to see him!’ added the raven.

She stood in front of the door by which she had entered, and did not come nearer.

‘Will he sleep?’ she asked.

‘I fear not,’ he replied; ‘he is neither weary nor heavy laden.’

‘Why then have you brought him?’

‘I have my fears it may prove precipitate.’

‘I do not quite understand you,’ I said, with an uneasy foreboding as to what she meant, but a vague hope of some escape. ‘Surely a man must do a day’s work first!’

I gazed in the white face of the woman, and my heart fluttered. She returned my gaze in silence.

‘Let me first go home,’ I resumed, ‘and come again after I have found or made, invented, or at least discovered something!’

‘He has not yet learned that the day begins with sleep!’ said the woman, turning to her husband. ‘Tell him he must rest before he can do anything!’

‘Men,’ he answered, ‘think so much of having done, that they fall asleep upon it. They cannot empty an egg but they turn into the shell, and lie down!’

The words drew my eyes from the woman to the raven.

I saw no raven, but the librarian – the same slender elderly man, in a rusty black coat, large in the body and long in the tails. I had seen only his back before; now for the first time I saw his face. It was so thin that it showed the shape of the bones under it, suggesting the skulls his last-claimed profession must have made him familiar with. But in truth I had never before seen a face so alive, or a look so keen or so friendly as that in his pale blue eyes, which yet had a haze about them as if they had done much weeping.

‘You knew I was not a raven!’ he said with a smile.

‘I knew you were Mr Raven,’ I replied; ‘but somehow I thought you a bird too!’

‘What made you think me a bird?’

‘You looked a raven, and I saw you dig worms out of the earth with your beak.’

‘And then?’

‘Toss them in the air.’

‘And then?’

‘They grew butterflies, and flew away.’

‘Did you ever see a raven do that? I told you I was a sexton!’

‘Does a sexton toss worms in the air, and turn them into butterflies?’

‘Yes.’

‘I never saw one do it!’

‘You saw me do it! – But I am still librarian in your house, for I never was dismissed, and never gave up the office. Now I am librarian here as well.’

‘But you have just told me you were sexton here!’

‘So I am. It is much the same profession. Except you are a true sexton, books are but dead bodies to you, and a library nothing but a catacomb!’

‘You bewilder me!’

‘That’s all right!’

A few moments he stood silent. The woman, moveless as a statue, stood silent also by the coffin-door.

‘Upon occasion,’ said the sexton at length, ‘it is more convenient to put one’s bird-self in front. Every one, as you ought to know, has a beast-self – and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, ay, and a creeping serpent-self too – which it takes a deal of crushing to kill! In truth he has also a tree-self and a crystal-self, and I don’t know how many selves more – all to get into harmony. You can tell what sort a man is by his creature that comes oftenest to the front.’

He turned to his wife, and I considered him more closely. He was above the ordinary height, and stood more erect than when I last saw him. His face was, like his wife’s, very pale; its nose handsomely encased the beak that had retired within it; its lips were very thin, and even they had no colour, but their curves were beautiful, and about them quivered a shadowy smile that had humour in it as well as love and pity.

‘We are in want of something to eat and drink, wife,’ he said, ‘we have come a long way!’

‘You know, husband,’ she answered, ‘we can give only to him that asks.’

She turned her unchanging face and radiant eyes upon mine.

‘Please give me something to eat, Mrs Raven,’ I said, ‘and something – what you will – to quench my thirst.’

‘Your thirst must be greater before you can have what will quench it,’ she replied, ‘but what I can give you, I will gladly.’

She went to a cupboard in the wall, brought from it bread and wine, and set them on the table.

We sat down to the perfect meal; and as I ate, the bread and wine seemed to go deeper than the hunger and thirst. Anxiety and discomfort vanished; expectation took their place.

I grew very sleepy, and now first felt weary.

'I have earned neither food nor sleep, Mrs Raven,' I said, 'but you have given me the one freely, and now I hope you will give me the other, for I sorely need it.'

'Sleep is too fine a thing ever to be earned,' said the sexton; 'it must be given and accepted, for it is a necessity. But it would be perilous to use this house as a half-way hostelry – for the repose of a night, that is, merely.'

A wild-looking little black cat jumped on his knee as he spoke. He patted it as one pats a child to make it go to sleep: he seemed to me patting down the sod upon a grave – patting it lovingly, with an inward lullaby.

'Here is one of Mara's kittens!' he said to his wife: 'will you give it something and put it out? she may want it!'

The woman took it from him gently, give it a little piece of bread, and went out with it, closing the door behind her.

'How then am I to make use of your hospitality?' I asked.

'By accepting it to the full,' he answered.

'I do not understand.'

'In this house no one wakes of himself.'

'Why?'

'Because no one anywhere ever wakes of himself. You can wake yourself no more than you can make yourself.'

'Then perhaps you or Mrs Raven would kindly call me!' I said, still nowise understanding, but feeling afresh that vague foreboding.

'We cannot.'

'How dare I then go to sleep?' I cried.

'If you would have the rest of this house, you must not trouble yourself about waking. You must go to sleep heartily, altogether and outright.'

My soul sank within me.

The sexton sat looking at me in the face. His eyes seemed to say, 'Will you not trust me?' I returned his gaze, and answered,

'I will.'

'Then come,' he said; 'I will show you your couch.'

As we rose, the woman came in. She took up the candle, turned to the inner door, and led the way. I went close behind her, and the sexton followed.

CHAPTER 7

The Cemetery

The air as of an ice-house met me crossing the threshold.

The door fell-to behind us. The sexton said something to his wife that made her turn towards us. – What a change had passed upon her! It was as if the splendour of her eyes had grown too much for them to hold, and, sinking into her countenance, made it flash with a loveliness like that of Beatrice in the white rose of the redeemed. Life itself, life eternal, immortal, streamed from it, an unbroken lightning. Even her hands shone with a white radiance, every 'pearl-shell helmet' gleaming like a moonstone. Her beauty was overpowering; I was glad when she turned it from me.

But the light of the candle reached such a little way, that at first I could see nothing of the place. Presently, however, it fell on something that glimmered, a little raised from the floor. Was it a bed? Could live thing sleep in such a mortal cold? Then surely it was no wonder it should not wake of itself! Beyond that appeared a fainter shine; and then I thought I descried uncertain gleams on every side.

A few paces brought us to the first; it was a human form under a sheet, straight and still – whether of man or woman I could not tell, for the light seemed to avoid the face as we passed.

I soon perceived that we were walking along an aisle of couches, on almost every one of which, with its head to the passage, lay something asleep or dead, covered with a sheet white as snow. My soul grew silent with dread. Through aisle after aisle we went, among couches innumerable.

I could see only a few of them at once, but they were on all sides, vanishing, as it seemed, in the infinite. – Was it here lay my choice of a bed? Must I go to sleep among the unwaking, with no one to rouse me? Was this the sexton's library? were these his books? Truly it was no half-way house, this chamber of the dead!

'One of the cellars I am placed to watch!' remarked Mr Raven – in a low voice, as if fearing to disturb his silent guests. 'Much wine is set here to ripen! – But it is dark for a stranger!' he added.

'The moon is rising; she will soon be here,' said his wife, and her clear voice, low and sweet, sounded of ancient sorrow long bidden adieu.

Even as she spoke the moon looked in at an opening in the wall, and a thousand gleams of white responded to her shine. But not yet could I descry beginning or end of the couches. They stretched away and away, as if for all the disparted world to sleep upon. For along the far receding narrow ways, every couch stood by itself, and on each slept a lonely sleeper. I thought at first their sleep was death, but I soon saw it was something deeper still – a something I did not know.

The moon rose higher, and shone through other openings, but I could never see enough of the place at once to know its shape or character; now it would resemble a long cathedral nave, now a huge barn made into a dwelling of tombs. She looked colder than any moon in the frostiest night of the world, and where she shone direct upon them, cast a bluish, icy gleam on the white sheets and the pallid countenances – but it might be the faces that made the moon so cold!

Of such as I could see, all were alike in the brotherhood of death, all unlike in the character and history recorded upon them. Here lay a man who had died – for although this was not death, I have no other name to give it – in the prime of manly strength; his dark beard seemed to flow like a liberated stream from the glacier of his frozen countenance; his forehead was smooth as polished marble; a shadow of pain lingered about his lips, but only a shadow. On the next couch lay the form of a girl, passing lovely to behold. The sadness left on her face by parting was not yet absorbed in perfect peace, but absolute submission possessed the placid features, which bore no sign of wasting disease, of 'killing care or grief of heart': if pain had been there, it was long charmed asleep, never again to awake. Many were the beautiful that there lay very still – some of them mere children; but

I did not see one infant. The most beautiful of all was a lady whose white hair, and that alone, suggested her old when first she fell asleep. On her stately countenance rested – not submission, but a right noble acquiescence, an assurance, firm as the foundations of the universe, that all was as it should be. On some faces lingered the almost obliterated scars of strife, the marrings of hopeless loss, the fading shadows of sorrows that had seemed inconsolable: the aurora of the great morning had not yet quite melted them away; but those faces were few, and every one that bore such brand of pain seemed to plead, 'Pardon me: I died only yesterday!' or, 'Pardon me: I died but a century ago!' That some had been dead for ages I knew, not merely by their unutterable repose, but by something for which I have neither word nor symbol.

We came at last to three empty couches, immediately beyond which lay the form of a beautiful woman, a little past the prime of life. One of her arms was outside the sheet, and her hand lay with the palm upward, in its centre a dark spot. Next to her was the stalwart figure of a man of middle age. His arm too was outside the sheet, the strong hand almost closed, as if clenched on the grip of a sword. I thought he must be a king who had died fighting for the truth.

'Will you hold the candle nearer, wife?' whispered the sexton, bending down to examine the woman's hand.

'It heals well,' he murmured to himself: 'the nail found in her nothing to hurt!'

At last I ventured to speak.

'Are they not dead?' I asked softly.

'I cannot answer you,' he replied in a subdued voice. 'I almost forget what they mean by *dead* in the old world. If I said a person was dead, my wife would understand one thing, and you would imagine another. – This is but one of my treasure vaults,' he went on, 'and all my guests are not laid in vaults: out there on the moor they lie thick as the leaves of a forest after the first blast of your winter – thick, let me say rather, as if the great white rose of heaven had shed its petals over it. All night the moon reads their faces, and smiles.'

'But why leave them in the corrupting moonlight?' I asked.

'Our moon,' he answered, 'is not like yours – the old cinder of a burnt-out world; her beams embalm the dead, not corrupt them. You observe that

here the sexton lays his dead on the earth; he buries very few under it! In your world he lays huge stones on them, as if to keep them down; I watch for the hour to ring the resurrection-bell, and wake those that are still asleep. Your sexton looks at the clock to know when to ring the dead-alive to church; I hearken for the cock on the spire to crow: "*Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead!*"'

I began to conclude that the self-styled sexton was in truth an insane parson: the whole thing was too mad! But how was I to get away from it? I was helpless! In this world of the dead, the raven and his wife were the only living I had yet seen: whither should I turn for help? I was lost in a space larger than imagination; for if here two things, or any parts of them, could occupy the same space, why not twenty or ten thousand? – But I dared not think further in that direction.

'You seem in your dead to see differences beyond my perception!' I ventured to remark.

'None of those you see,' he answered, 'are in truth quite dead yet, and some have but just begun to come alive and die. Others had begun to die, that is to come alive, long before they came to us; and when such are indeed dead, that instant they will wake and leave us. Almost every night some rise and go. But I will not say more, for I find my words only mislead you! – This is the couch that has been waiting for you,' he ended, pointing to one of the three.

'Why just this?' I said, beginning to tremble, and anxious by parley to delay.

'For reasons which one day you will be glad to know,' he answered.

'Why not know them now?'

'That also you will know when you wake.'

'But these are all dead, and I am alive!' I objected, shuddering.

'Not much,' rejoined the sexton with a smile, '—not nearly enough! Blessed be the true life that the pauses between its throbs are not death!'

'The place is too cold to let one sleep!' I said.

'Do these find it so?' he returned. 'They sleep well – or will soon. Of cold they feel not a breath: it heals their wounds. – Do not be a coward, Mr Vane. Turn your back on fear, and your face to whatever may come. Give yourself up to the night, and you will rest indeed. Harm will not come to you, but a good you cannot foreknow.'

The sexton and I stood by the side of the couch, his wife, with the candle in her hand, at the foot of it. Her eyes were full of light, but her face was again of a still whiteness – it was no longer radiant.

'Would they have me make of a charnel-house my bedchamber?' I cried aloud. 'I will not. I will lie abroad on the heath, it cannot be colder there!'

'I have just told you that the dead are there also,

"Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
In Vallombrosa,"'

said the librarian.

'I will *not,*' I cried again; and in the compassing dark, the two gleamed out like spectres that waited on the dead; neither answered me; each stood still and sad, and looked at the other.

'Be of good comfort; we watch the flock of the great shepherd,' said the sexton to his wife.

Then he turned to me.

'Didst thou not find the air of the place pure and sweet when thou enteredst it?' he asked.

'Yes; but oh, so cold!' I answered.

'Then know,' he returned, and his voice was stern, 'that thou who callest thyself alive, hast brought into this chamber the odours of death, and its air will not be wholesome for the sleepers until thou art gone from it!'

They went farther into the great chamber, and I was left alone in the moonlight with the dead.

I turned to escape.

What a long way I found it back through the dead! At first I was too angry to be afraid, but as I grew calm, the still shapes grew terrible. At last, with loud offence to the gracious silence, I ran, I fled wildly, and bursting out, flung-to the door behind me. It closed with an awful silence.

I stood in pitch-darkness. Feeling about me, I found a door, opened it, and was aware of the dim light of a lamp. I stood in my library, with the handle of the masked door in my hand.

Had I come to myself out of a vision? – or lost myself by going back to one? Which was the real – what I now saw, or what I had just ceased to see? Could both be real, interpenetrating yet unmingling?

I threw myself on a couch, and fell asleep.

In the library was one small window to the east, through which, at this time of the year, the first rays of the sun shone upon a mirror whence they were reflected on the masked door: when I woke, there they shone, and thither they drew my eyes. With the feeling that behind it must lie the boundless chamber I had left by that door, I sprang to my feet, and opened it. The light, like an eager hound, shot before me into the closet, and pounced upon the gilded edges of a large book.

‘What idiot,’ I cried, ‘has put that book in the shelf the wrong way?’

But the gilded edges, reflecting the light a second time, flung it on a nest of drawers in a dark corner, and I saw that one of them was half open.

‘More meddling!’ I cried, and went to close the drawer.

It contained old papers, and seemed more than full, for it would not close. Taking the topmost one out, I perceived that it was in my father’s writing and of some length. The words on which first my eyes fell, at once made me eager to learn what it contained. I carried it to the library, sat down in one of the western windows, and read what follows.

CHAPTER 8

My Father's Manuscript

I am filled with awe of what I have to write. The sun is shining golden above me, the sea lies blue beneath his gaze, the same world sends its growing things up to the sun, and its flying things into the air which I have breathed from my infancy, but I know the outspread splendour a passing show, and that at any moment it may, like the drop-scene of a stage, be lifted to reveal more wonderful things.

Shortly after my father's death, I was seated one morning in the library. I had been, somewhat listlessly, regarding the portrait that hangs among the books, which I knew only as that of a distant ancestor, and wishing I could learn something of its original. Then I had taken a book from the shelves and begun to read.

Glancing up from it, I saw coming toward me – not between me and the door, but between me and the portrait – a thin pale man in rusty black. He looked sharp and eager, and had a notable nose, at once reminding me of a certain jug my sisters used to call Mr Crow.

'Finding myself in your vicinity, Mr Vane, I have given myself the pleasure of calling,' he said, in a peculiar but not disagreeable voice. 'Your honoured grandfather treated me – I may say it without presumption – as a friend, having known me from childhood as his father's librarian.'

It did not strike me at the time how old the man must be.

'May I ask where you live now, Mr Crow?' I said.

He smiled an amused smile.

'You nearly hit my name,' he rejoined, 'which shows the family insight. You have seen me before, but only once, and could not then have heard it!'

'Where was that?'

'In this very room. You were quite a child, however!'

I could not be sure that I remembered him, but for a moment I fancied I did, and I begged him to set me right as to his name.

'There is such a thing as remembering without recognising the memory in it,' he remarked. 'For my name – which you have near enough – it used to be Raven.'

I had heard the name, for marvellous tales had brought it me.

'It is very kind of you to come and see me,' I said. 'Will you not sit down?'

He seated himself at once.

'You knew my father, then, I presume?'

'I knew him,' he answered with a curious smile, 'but he did not care about my acquaintance, and we never met. – That gentleman, however,' he added, pointing to the portrait, – 'old Sir Up'ard, his people called him, – was in his day a friend of mine yet more intimate than ever your grandfather became.'

Then at length I began to think the interview a strange one. But in truth it was hardly stranger that my visitor should remember Sir Upward, than that he should have been my great-grandfather's librarian!

'I owe him much,' he continued, 'for, although I had read many more books than he, yet, through the special direction of his studies, he was able to inform me of a certain relation of modes which I should never have discovered of myself, and could hardly have learned from any one else.'

'Would you mind telling me all about that?' I said.

'By no means – as much at least as I am able: there are not such things as wilful secrets,' he answered – and went on.

'That closet held his library – a hundred manuscripts or so, for printing was not then invented. One morning I sat there, working at a catalogue of them, when he looked in at the door, and said, "Come." I laid down my pen and followed him – across the great hall, down a steep rough descent, and along an underground passage to a tower he had lately built, consisting of a stair and a room at the top of it. The door of this room had a tremendous lock, which he undid with the smallest key I ever saw. I had scarcely crossed

the threshold after him, when, to my eyes, he began to dwindle, and grew less and less. All at once my vision seemed to come right, and I saw that he was moving swiftly away from me. In a minute more he was the merest speck in the distance, with the tops of blue mountains beyond him, clear against a sky of paler blue. I recognised the country, for I had gone there and come again many a time, although I had never known this way to it.

'Many years after, when the tower had long disappeared, I taught one of his descendants what Sir Upward had taught me, and now and then to this day I use your house when I want to go the nearest way home. I must indeed – without your leave, for which I ask your pardon – have by this time well established a right of way through it – not from front to back, but from bottom to top!'

'You would have me then understand, Mr Raven,' I said, 'that you go through my house into another world, heedless of disparting space?'

'That I go through it is an incontrovertible acknowledgment of space,' returned the old librarian.

'Please do not quibble, Mr Raven,' I rejoined. 'Please to take my question as you know I mean it.'

'There is in your house a door, one step through which carries me into a world very much another than this.'

'A better?'

'Not throughout; but so much another that most of its physical, and many of its mental laws are different from those of this world. As for moral laws, they must everywhere be fundamentally the same.'

'You try my power of belief!' I said.

'You take me for a madman, probably?'

'You do not look like one.'

'A liar then?'

'You give me no ground to think you such.'

'Only you do not believe me?'

'I will go out of that door with you if you like: I believe in you enough to risk the attempt.'

'The blunder all my children make!' he murmured. 'The only door out is the door in!'

I began to think he must be crazy. He sat silent for a moment, his head resting on his hand, his elbow on the table, and his eyes on the books before

him.

'A book,' he said louder, 'is a door in, and therefore a door out. – I see old Sir Up'ard,' he went on, closing his eyes, 'and my heart swells with love to him: – what world is he in?'

'The world of your heart!' I replied; '—that is, the idea of him is there.'

'There is one world then at least on which your hall-door does not open?'

'I grant you so much; but the things in that world are not things to have and to hold.'

'Think a little farther,' he rejoined: 'did anything ever become yours, except by getting into that world? – The thought is beyond you, however, at present! – I tell you there are more worlds, and more doors to them, than you will think of in many years!'

He rose, left the library, crossed the hall, and went straight up to the garret, familiar evidently with every turn. I followed, studying his back. His hair hung down long and dark, straight and glossy. His coat was wide and reached to his heels. His shoes seemed too large for him.

In the garret a light came through at the edges of the great roofing slabs, and showed us parts where was no flooring, and we must step from joist to joist: in the middle of one of these spaces rose a partition, with a door: through it I followed Mr Raven into a small, obscure chamber, whose top contracted as it rose, and went slanting through the roof.

'That is the door I spoke of,' he said, pointing to an oblong mirror that stood on the floor and leaned against the wall. I went in front of it, and saw our figures dimly reflected in its dusty face. There was something about it that made me uneasy. It looked old-fashioned and neglected, but, notwithstanding its ordinary seeming, the eagle, perched with outstretched wings on the top, appeared threatful.

'As a mirror,' said the librarian, 'it has grown dingy with age; but that is no matter: its doorness depends on the light.'

'Light!' I rejoined; 'there is no light here!'

He did not answer me, but began to pull at a little chain on the opposite wall. I heard a creaking: the top of the chamber was turning slowly round. He ceased pulling, looked at his watch, and began to pull again.

'We arrive almost to the moment!' he said, 'it is on the very stroke of noon!'

The top went creaking and revolving for a minute or so. Then he pulled two other chains, now this, now that, and returned to the first. A moment more and the chamber grew much clearer: a patch of sunlight had fallen upon a mirror on the wall opposite that against which the other leaned, and on the dust I saw the path of the reflected rays to the mirror on the ground. But from the latter none were returned; they seemed to go clean through; there was nowhere in the chamber a second patch of light!

'Where are the sunrays gone?' I cried.

'That I cannot tell,' returned Mr Raven; '— back, perhaps, to where they came from first. They now belong, I fancy, to a sense not yet developed in us.'

He then talked of the relations of mind to matter, and of sense to qualities, in a way I could only a little understand, whence he went on to yet stranger things which I could not at all comprehend. He spoke much about dimensions, *telling me that there were many more than three, some of them concerned with powers which were indeed in us, but of which as yet we knew absolutely nothing. His words, however, I confess, took little more hold of me than the light did of the mirror, for I thought he hardly knew what he was saying.*

Suddenly I was aware that our forms had gone from the mirror, which seemed full of a white mist. As I gazed I saw, growing gradually visible beyond the mist, the tops of a range of mountains, which became clearer and clearer. Soon the mist vanished entirely, uncovering the face of a wide heath, on which, at some distance, was the figure of a man moving swiftly away. I turned to address my companion, he was no longer by my side. I looked again at the form in the mirror, and recognised the wide coat flying, the black hair lifting in a wind that did not touch me. I rushed in terror from the place.

CHAPTER 9

I Repent

I laid the manuscript down, consoled to find that my father had had a peep into that mysterious world, and that he knew Mr Raven.

Then I remembered that I had never heard the cause or any circumstance of my father's death, and began to believe that he must at last have followed Mr Raven, and not come back; whereupon I speedily grew ashamed of my flight. What wondrous facts might I not by this time have gathered concerning life and death, and wide regions beyond ordinary perception! Assuredly the Ravens were good people, and a night in their house would nowise have hurt me! They were doubtless strange, but it was faculty in which the one was peculiar, and beauty in which the other was marvellous! And I had not believed in them! had treated them as unworthy of my confidence, as harbouring a design against me! The more I thought of my behaviour to them, the more disgusted I became with myself. Why should I have feared such dead? To share their holy rest was an honour of which I had proved myself unworthy! What harm could that sleeping king, that lady with the wound in her palm, have done me? I felt a longing after the sweet and stately stillness of their two countenances, and wept. Weeping I threw myself on a couch, and suddenly fell asleep.

As suddenly I woke, feeling as if some one had called me. The house was still as an empty church. A blackbird was singing on the lawn. I said to myself, 'I will go and tell them I am ashamed, and will do whatever they would have me do!' I rose and went straight up the stairs to the garret.

The wooden chamber was just as when first I saw it, the mirror dimly reflecting everything before it. It was nearly noon, and the sun would be a little higher than when first I came: I must raise the hood a little, and adjust the mirrors accordingly! If I had but been in time to see Mr Raven do it!

I pulled the chains, and let the light fall on the first mirror. I turned then to the other: there were the shapes of the former vision – distinguishable indeed, but tremulous like a landscape in a pool ruffled by 'a small pipling wind!' I touched the glass; it was impermeable.

Suspecting polarisation as the thing required, I shifted and shifted the mirrors, changing their relation, until at last, in a great degree, so far as I was concerned, by chance, things came right between them, and I saw the mountains blue and steady and clear. I stepped forward, and my feet were among the heather.

All I knew of the way to the cottage was that we had gone through a pine-forest. I passed through many thickets and several small fir-woods, continually fancying afresh that I recognised something of the country; but I had come upon no forest, and now the sun was near the horizon, and the air had begun to grow chill with the coming winter, when, to my delight, I saw a little black object coming toward me: it was indeed the raven!

I hastened to meet him.

'I beg your pardon, sir, for my rudeness last night,' I said. 'Will you take me with you now? I heartily confess I do not deserve it.'

'Ah!' he returned, and looked up. Then, after a brief pause, 'My wife does not expect you to-night,' he said. 'She regrets that we at all encouraged your staying last week.'

'Take me to her that I may tell her how sorry I am,' I begged humbly.

'It is of no use,' he answered. 'Your night was not come then, or you would not have left us. It is not come now, and I cannot show you the way. The dead were rejoicing under their daisies – they all lie among the roots of the flowers of heaven – at the thought of your delight when the winter should be past, and the morning with its birds come: ere you left them, they shivered in their beds. When the spring of the universe arrives, – but that cannot be for ages yet! how many, I do not know – and do not care to know.'

'Tell me one thing, I beg of you, Mr Raven: is my father with you? Have you seen him since he left the world?'

‘Yes; he is with us, fast asleep. That was he you saw with his arm on the coverlet, his hand half closed.’

‘Why did you not tell me? That I should have been so near him, and not know!’

‘And turn your back on him!’ corrected the raven.

‘I would have lain down at once had I known!’

‘I doubt it. Had you been ready to lie down, you would have known him! – Old Sir Up’ard,’ he went on, ‘and your twice great-grandfather, both are up and away long ago. Your great-grandfather has been with us for many a year, I think he will soon begin to stir. You saw him last night, though of course you did not know him.’

‘Why *of course*?’

‘Because he is so much nearer waking than you. No one who will not sleep can ever wake.’

‘I do not at all understand you!’

‘You turned away, and would not understand!’

I held my peace. – But if I did not say something, he would go!

‘And my grandfather – is he also with you?’ I asked.

‘No, he is still in the Evil Wood, fighting the dead.’

‘Where is the Evil Wood, that I may find him?’

‘You will not find him; but you will hardly miss the wood. It is the place where those who will not sleep, wake up at night, to kill their dead and bury them.’

‘I cannot understand you!’

‘Naturally not. Neither do I understand you; I can read neither your heart nor your face. When my wife and I do not understand our children, it is because there is not enough of them to be understood. God alone can understand foolishness.’

‘Then,’ I said, feeling naked and very worthless, ‘will you be so good as show me the nearest way home? There are more ways than one, I know, for I have gone by two already.’

‘There are indeed many ways.’

‘Tell me, please, how to recognise the nearest.’

‘I cannot,’ answered the raven; ‘you and I use the same words with different meanings. We are often unable to tell people what they *need* to know, because they *want* to know something else, and would therefore only

misunderstand what we said. Home is ever so far away in the palm of your hand, and how to get there it is of no use to tell you. But you will get there; you must get there; you have to get there. Everybody who is not at home, has to go home. You thought you were at home where I found you: if that had been your home, you could not have left it. Nobody can leave home. And nobody ever was or ever will be at home without having gone there.'

'Enigma treading on enigma!' I exclaimed. 'I did not come here to be asked riddles.'

'No; but you came, and found the riddles waiting for you! Indeed you are yourself the only riddle. What you call riddles are truths, and seem riddles because you are not true.'

'Worse and worse!' I cried.

'And you *must* answer the riddles!' he continued. 'They will go on asking themselves until you understand yourself. The universe is a riddle trying to get out, and you are holding your door hard against it.'

'Will you not in pity tell me what I am to do – where I must go?'

'How should I tell *your* to-do, or the way to it?'

'If I am not to go home, at least direct me to some of my kind.'

'I do not know of any. The beings most like you are in that direction.'

He pointed with his beak. I could see nothing but the setting sun, which blinded me.

'Well,' I said bitterly, 'I cannot help feeling hardly treated – taken from my home, abandoned in a strange world, and refused instruction as to where I am to go or what I am to do!'

'You forget,' said the raven, 'that, when I brought you and you declined my hospitality, you reached what you call home in safety: now you are come of yourself! Good night.'

He turned and walked slowly away, with his beak toward the ground. I stood dazed. It was true I had come of myself, but had I not come with intent of atonement? My heart was sore, and in my brain was neither quest nor purpose, hope nor desire. I gazed after the raven, and would have followed him, but felt it useless.

All at once he pounced on a spot, throwing the whole weight of his body on his bill, and for some moments dug vigorously. Then with a flutter of his wings he threw back his head, and something shot from his bill, cast high in the air. That moment the sun set, and the air at once grew very dusk, but the

something opened into a soft radiance, and came pulsing toward me like a fire-fly, but with a much larger and a yellower light. It flew over my head. I turned and followed it.

Here I interrupt my narrative to remark that it involves a constant struggle to say what cannot be said with even an approach to precision, the things recorded being, in their nature and in that of the creatures concerned in them, so inexpressibly different from any possible events of this economy, that I can present them only by giving, in the forms and language of life in this world, the modes in which they affected me – not the things themselves, but the feelings they woke in me. Even this much, however, I do with a continuous and abiding sense of failure, finding it impossible to present more than one phase of a multitudinously complicated significance, or one concentric sphere of a graduated embodiment. A single thing would sometimes seem to be and mean many things, with an uncertain identity at the heart of them, which kept constantly altering their look. I am indeed often driven to set down what I know to be but a clumsy and doubtful representation of the mere feeling aimed at, none of the communicating media of this world being fit to convey it, in its peculiar strangeness, with even an approach to clearness or certainty. Even to one who knew the region better than myself, I should have no assurance of transmitting the reality of my experience in it. While without a doubt, for instance, that I was actually regarding a scene of activity, I might be, at the same moment, in my consciousness aware that I was perusing a metaphysical argument.

CHAPTER 10

The Bad Burrow

As the air grew black and the winter closed swiftly around me, the fluttering fire blazed out more luminous, and arresting its flight, hovered waiting. So soon as I came under its radiance, it flew slowly on, lingering now and then above spots where the ground was rocky. Every time I looked up, it seemed to have grown larger, and at length gave me an attendant shadow. Plainly a bird-butterfly, it flew with a certain swallowy double. Its wings were very large, nearly square, and flashed all the colours of the rainbow. Wondering at their splendour, I became so absorbed in their beauty that I stumbled over a low rock, and lay stunned. When I came to myself, the creature was hovering over my head, radiating the whole chord of light, with multitudinous gradations and some kinds of colour I had never before seen. I rose and went on, but, unable to take my eyes off the shining thing to look to my steps, I struck my foot against a stone. Fearing then another fall, I sat down to watch the little glory, and a great longing awoke in me to have it in my hand. To my unspeakable delight, it began to sink toward me. Slowly at first, then swiftly it sank, growing larger as it came nearer. I felt as if the treasure of the universe were giving itself to me – put out my hand, and had it. But the instant I took it, its light went out; all was dark as pitch; a dead book with boards outspread lay cold and heavy in my hand. I threw it in the air – only to hear it fall among the heather. Burying my face in my hands, I sat in motionless misery.

But the cold grew so bitter that, fearing to be frozen, I got up. The moment I was on my feet, a faint sense of light awoke in me. ‘Is it coming

to life?' I cried, and a great pang of hope shot through me. Alas, no! it was the edge of a moon peering up keen and sharp over a level horizon! She brought me light – but no guidance! *She* would not hover over me, would not wait on my faltering steps! She could but offer me an ignorant choice!

With a full face she rose, and I began to see a little about me. Westward of her, and not far from me, a range of low hills broke the horizon-line: I set out for it.

But what a night I had to pass ere I reached it! The moon seemed to know something, for she stared at me oddly. Her look was indeed icy-cold, but full of interest, or at least curiosity. She was not the same moon I had known on the earth; her face was strange to me, and her light yet stranger. Perhaps it came from an unknown sun! Every time I looked up, I found her staring at me with all her might! At first I was annoyed, as at the rudeness of a fellow creature; but soon I saw or fancied a certain wondering pity in her gaze: why was I out in her night? Then first I knew what an awful thing it was to be awake in the universe: I *was*, and could not help it!

As I walked, my feet lost the heather, and trod a bare spongy soil, something like dry, powdery peat. To my dismay it gave a momentary heave under me; then presently I saw what seemed the ripple of an earthquake running on before me, shadowy in the low moon. It passed into the distance; but, while yet I stared after it, a single wave rose up, and came slowly toward me. A yard or two away it burst, and from it, with a scramble and a bound, issued an animal like a tiger. About his mouth and ears hung clots of mould, and his eyes winked and flamed as he rushed at me, showing his white teeth in a soundless snarl. I stood fascinated, unconscious of either courage or fear He turned his head to the ground, and plunged into it.

'That moon is affecting my brain,' I said as I resumed my journey. 'What life can be here but the phantasmic – the stuff of which dreams are made? I am indeed walking in a vain show!'

Thus I strove to keep my heart above the waters of fear, nor knew that she whom I distrusted was indeed my defence from the realities I took for phantoms: her light controlled the monsters, else had I scarce taken a second step on the hideous ground. 'I will not be appalled by that which only seems!' I said to myself, yet felt it a terrible thing to walk on a sea where such fishes disported themselves below. With that, a step or two from

me, the head of a worm began to come slowly out of the earth, as big as that of a polar bear and much resembling it, with a white mane to its red neck. The drawing wriggles with which its huge length extricated itself were horrible, yet I dared not turn my eyes from them. The moment its tail was free, it lay as if exhausted, wallowing in feeble effort to burrow again.

'Does it live on the dead,' I wondered, 'and is it unable to hurt the living? If they scent their prey and come out, why do they leave me unharmed?'

I know now it was that the moon paralysed them.

All the night through as I walked, hideous creatures, no two alike, threatened me. In some of them, beauty of colour enhanced loathliness of shape: one large serpent was covered from head to distant tail with feathers of glorious hues.

I became at length so accustomed to their hurtless menaces that I fell to beguiling the way with the invention of monstrosities, never suspecting that I owed each moment of life to the staring moon. Though hers was no primal radiance, it so hampered the evil things, that I walked in safety. For light is yet light, if but the last of a countless series of reflections! How swiftly would not my feet have carried me over the restless soil, had I known that, if still within their range when her lamp ceased to shine on the cursed spot, I should that moment be at the mercy of such as had no mercy, the centre of a writhing heap of hideousness every individual of it as terrible as before it had but seemed! Fool of ignorance, I watched the descent of the weary, solemn anxious moon down the widening vault above me, with no worse uneasiness than the dread of losing my way – where as yet I had indeed no way to lose.

I was drawing near the hills I had made my goal, and she was now not far from their sky-line, when the soundless wallowing ceased, and the burrow lay motionless and bare. Then I saw, slowly walking over the light soil, the form of a woman. A white mist floated about her, now assuming, now losing to reassume the shape of a garment, as it gathered to her or was blown from her by a wind that dogged her steps.

She was beautiful, but with such a pride at once and misery on her countenance that I could hardly believe what yet I saw. Up and down she walked, vainly endeavouring to lay hold of the mist and wrap it around her. The eyes in the beautiful face were dead, and on her left side was a dark spot, against which she would now and then press her hand, as if to stifle

pain or sickness. Her hair hung nearly to her feet, and sometimes the wind would so mix it with the mist that I could not distinguish the one from the other; but when it fell gathering together again, it shone a pale gold in the moonlight.

Suddenly pressing both hands on her heart, she fell to the ground, and the mist rose from her and melted in the air. I ran to her. But she began to writhe in such torture that I stood aghast. A moment more and her legs, hurrying from her body, sped away serpents. From her shoulders fled her arms as in terror, serpents also. Then something flew up from her like a bat, and when I looked again, she was gone. The ground rose like the sea in a storm, terror laid hold upon me; I turned to the hills and ran.

I was already on the slope of their base, when the moon sank behind one of their summits, leaving me in its shadow. Behind me rose a waste and sickening cry, as of frustrate desire – the only sound I had heard since the fall of the dead butterfly; it made my heart shake like a flag in the wind. I turned, saw many dark objects bounding after me, and made for the crest of a ridge on which the moon still shone. She seemed to linger there that I might see to defend myself. Soon I came in sight of her, and climbed the faster.

Crossing the shadow of a rock, I heard the creatures panting at my heels. But just as the foremost threw himself upon me with a snarl of greedy hate, we rushed into the moon together. She flashed out an angry light, and he fell from me a bodiless blotch. Strength came to me, and I turned on the rest. But one by one as they darted into the light, they dropped with a howl; and I saw or fancied a strange smile on the round face above me.

I climbed to the top of the ridge: far away shone the moon, sinking to a low horizon. The air was pure and strong. I descended a little way, found it warmer, and sat down to wait the dawn.

The moon went below, and the world again was dark.

CHAPTER 11

The Evil Wood

I fell fast asleep, and when I woke the sun was rising. I went to the top again, and looked back: the hollow I had crossed in the moonlight lay without sign of life. Could it be that the calm expanse before me swarmed with creatures of devouring greed?

I turned and looked over the land through which my way must lie. It seemed a wide desert, with a patch of a different colour in the distance that might be a forest. Sign of presence, human or animal, was none – smoke or dust or shadow of cultivation. Not a cloud floated in the clear heaven; no thinnest haze curtained any segment of its circling rim.

I descended, and set out for the imaginable forest: something alive might be there; on this side of it could not well be anything!

When I reached the plain, I found it, as far as my sight could go, of rock, here flat and channeled, there humped and pinnacled – evidently the wide bed of a vanished river, scored by innumerable water-runs, without a trace of moisture in them. Some of the channels bore a dry moss, and some of the rocks a few lichens almost as hard as themselves. The air, once ‘filled with pleasant noise of waters,’ was silent as death. It took me the whole day to reach the patch, – which I found indeed a forest – but not a rudiment of brook or runnel had I crossed! Yet through the glowing noon I seemed haunted by an aural mirage, hearing so plainly the voice of many waters that I could hardly believe the opposing testimony of my eyes.

The sun was approaching the horizon when I left the riverbed, and entered the forest. Sunk below the tree-tops, and sending his rays between

their pillar-like boles, he revealed a world of blessed shadows waiting to receive me. I had expected a pinewood, but here were trees of many sorts, some with strong resemblances to trees I knew, others with marvellous differences from any I had ever seen. I threw myself beneath the boughs of what seemed a eucalyptus in blossom: its flowers had a hard calyx much resembling a skull, the top of which rose like a lid to let the froth-like bloom-brain overfoam its cup. From beneath the shadow of its falchion-leaves my eyes went wandering into deep after deep of the forest.

Soon, however, its doors and windows began to close, shutting up aisle and corridor and roomier glade. The night was about me, and instant and sharp the cold. Again what a night I found it! How shall I make my reader share with me its wild ghostiness?

The tree under which I lay rose high before it branched, but the boughs of it bent so low that they seemed ready to shut me in as I leaned against the smooth stem, and let my eyes wander through the brief twilight of the vanishing forest. Presently, to my listless roving gaze, the varied outlines of the clumpy foliage began to assume or imitate – say rather *suggest* other shapes than their own. A light wind began to blow; it set the boughs of a neighbour tree rocking, and all their branches aswing, every twig and every leaf blending its individual motion with the sway of its branch and the rock of its bough. Among its leafy shapes was a pack of wolves that struggled to break from a wizard's leash: greyhounds would not have strained so savagely! I watched them with an interest that grew as the wind gathered force, and their motions life.

Another mass of foliage, larger and more compact, presented my fancy with a group of horses' heads and forequarters projecting caparisoned from their stalls. Their necks kept moving up and down, with an impatience that augmented as the growing wind broke their vertical rhythm with a wilder swaying from side to side. What heads they were! how gaunt, how strange! – several of them bare skulls – one with the skin tight on its bones! One had lost the under jaw and hung low, looking unutterably weary – but now and then hove high as if to ease the bit. Above them, at the end of a branch, floated erect the form of a woman, waving her arms in imperious gesture. The definiteness of these and other leaf masses first surprised and then discomposed me: what if they should overpower my brain with seeming

reality? But the twilight became darkness; the wind ceased; every shape was shut up in the night; I fell asleep.

It was still dark when I began to be aware of a far-off, confused, rushing noise, mingled with faint cries. It grew and grew until a tumult as of gathering multitudes filled the wood. On all sides at once the sounds drew nearer; the spot where I lay seemed the centre of a commotion that extended throughout the forest. I scarce moved hand or foot lest I should betray my presence to hostile things.

The moon at length approached the forest, and came slowly into it: with her first gleam the noises increased to a deafening uproar, and I began to see dim shapes about me. As she ascended and grew brighter, the noises became yet louder, and the shapes clearer. A furious battle was raging around me. Wild cries and roars of rage, shock of onset, struggle prolonged, all mingled with words articulate, surged in my ears. Curses and credos, snarls and sneers, laughter and mockery, sacred names and howls of hate, came huddling in chaotic interpenetration. Skeletons and phantoms fought in maddest confusion. Swords swept through the phantoms: they only shivered. Maces crashed on the skeletons, shattering them hideously: not one fell or ceased to fight, so long as a single joint held two bones together. Bones of men and horses lay scattered and heaped; grinding and crunching them under foot fought the skeletons. Everywhere charged the bone-gaunt white steeds, everywhere on foot or on wind-blown misty battle-horses, raged and ravened and raved the indestructible spectres; weapons and hoofs clashed and crushed; while skeleton jaws and phantom-throats swelled the deafening tumult with the war-cry of every opinion, bad or good, that had bred strife, injustice, cruelty in any world. The holiest words went with the most hating blow. Lie-distorted truths flew hurtling in the wind of javelins and bones. Every moment some one would turn against his comrades, and fight more wildly than before, *The Truth! The Truth!* still his cry. One I noted who wheeled ever in a circle, and smote on all sides. Wearied out, a pair would sit for a minute side by side, then rise and renew the fierce combat. None stooped to comfort the fallen, or stepped wide to spare him.

The moon shone till the sun rose, and all the night long I had glimpses of a woman moving at her will above the strife-tormented multitude, now on this front now on that, one outstretched arm urging the fight, the other pressed against her side. ‘Ye are men: slay one another!’ she shouted. I saw

her dead eyes and her dark spot, and recalled what I had seen the night before.

Such was the battle of the dead, which I saw and heard as I lay under the tree.

Just before sunrise, a breeze went through the forest, and a voice cried, ‘Let the dead bury their dead!’ At the word the contending thousands dropped noiseless, and when the sun looked in, he saw never a bone, but here and there a withered branch.

I rose and resumed my journey, through as quiet a wood as ever grew out of the quiet earth. For the wind of the morning had ceased when the sun appeared, and the trees were silent. Not a bird sang, not a squirrel, mouse, or weasel showed itself, not a belated moth flew athwart my path. But as I went I kept watch over myself, nor dared let my eyes rest on any forest-shape. All the time I seemed to hear faint sounds of mattock and spade and hurting bones: any moment my eyes might open on things I would not see! Daylight prudence muttered that perhaps, to appear, ten thousand phantoms awaited only my consenting fancy.

In the middle of the afternoon I came out of the wood – to find before me a second net of dry water-courses. I thought at first that I had wandered from my attempted line, and reversed my direction, but I soon saw it was not so, and concluded presently that I had come to another branch of the same riverbed. I began at once to cross it, and was in the bottom of a wide channel when the sun set.

I sat down to await the moon, and growing sleepy, stretched myself on the moss. The moment my head was down, I heard the sounds of rushing streams – all sorts of sweet watery noises. The veiled melody of the molten music sang me into a dreamless sleep, and when I woke the sun was already up, and the wrinkled country widely visible. Covered with shadows it lay striped and mottled like the skin of some wild animal. As the sun rose the shadows diminished, and it seemed as if the rocks were reabsorbing the darkness that had oozed out of them during the night.

Hitherto I had loved my Arab mare and my books more, I fear, than live man or woman; now at length my soul was athirst for a human presence, and I longed even after those inhabitants of this alien world whom the raven had so vaguely described as nearest my sort. With heavy yet hoping heart,

and mind haunted by a doubt whether I was going in any direction at all, I kept wearily travelling ‘north-west and by south.’

CHAPTER 12

Friends and Foes

Coming, in one of the channels, upon what seemed a little shrub, the outlying picket, I trusted, of an army behind it, I knelt to look at it closer. It bore a small fruit, which, as I did not recognise it, I feared to gather and eat. Little I thought that I was watched from behind the rocks by hundreds of eyes eager with the question whether I would or would not take it.

I came to another plant somewhat bigger, then to another larger still, and at length to clumps of a like sort, by which time I saw that they were not shrubs but dwarf-trees. Before I reached the bank of this second branch of the river-bed, I found the channels so full of them that it was with difficulty I crossed such as I could not jump. In one I heard a great rush, as of a multitude of birds from an ivied wall, but saw nothing.

I came next to some large fruit-bearing trees, but what they bore looked coarse. They stood on the edge of a hollow, which evidently had once been the basin of a lake. From the left a forest seemed to flow into and fill it; but while the trees above were of many sorts, those in the hollow were almost entirely fruit-bearing.

I went a few yards down the slope of grass mingled with moss, and stretched myself upon it weary. A little farther down stood a tiny tree full of rosiest apples no bigger than small cherries, its top close to my hand; I pulled and ate one of them. Finding it delicious, I was in the act of taking another, when a sudden shouting of children, mingled with laughter clear and sweet as the music of a brook, startled me with delight.

‘He likes our apples! He likes our apples! He’s a good giant! He’s a good giant!’ cried many little voices.

‘He’s a giant!’ objected one.

‘He *is* rather big,’ assented another, ‘but littleness isn’t everything! It won’t keep you from growing big and stupid except you take care!’

I rose on my elbow and stared. Above and about and below me stood a multitude of children, apparently of all ages, some just able to run alone, and some about twelve or thirteen. Three or four seemed older. They stood in a small knot, a little apart, and were less excited than the rest. The many were chattering in groups, declaiming and contradicting, like a crowd of grown people in a city, only with greater merriment, better manners, and more sense.

I gathered that, by the approach of my hand to a second apple, they knew that I liked the first; but how from that they argued me good, I did not see, nor wondered that one of them at least should suggest caution. I did not open my mouth, for I was afraid of frightening them, and sure I should learn more by listening than by asking questions. For I understood nearly all they said – at which I was not surprised: to understand is not more wonderful than to love.

There came a movement and slight dispersion among them, and presently a sweet, innocent-looking, lovingly roguish little fellow handed me a huge green apple. Silence fell on the noisy throng; all waited expectant.

‘Eat, good giant,’ he said.

I sat up, took the apple, smiled thanks, and would have eaten; but the moment I bit into it, I flung it far away.

Again rose a shout of delight; they flung themselves upon me, so as nearly to smother me; they kissed my face and hands; they laid hold of my legs; they clambered about my arms and shoulders, embracing my head and neck. I came to the ground at last, overwhelmed with the lovely little goblins.

‘Good, good giant!’ they cried. ‘We knew you would come! Oh you dear, good, strong giant!’

The babble of their talk sprang up afresh, and ever the jubilant shout would rise anew from hundreds of clear little throats.

Again came a sudden silence. Those around me drew back, those atop of me got off and began trying to set me on my feet. Upon their sweet faces,

concern had taken the place of merriment.

‘Get up, good giant!’ said a little girl. ‘Make haste! much haste! He saw you throw his apple away!’

Before she ended, I was on my feet. She stood pointing up the slope. On the brow of it was a clownish, bad-looking fellow, a few inches taller than myself. He looked hostile, but I saw no reason to fear him, for he had no weapon, and my little friends had vanished every one.

He began to descend, and I, in the hope of better footing and position, to go up. He growled like a beast as he turned toward me.

Reaching a more level spot, I stood and waited for him. As he came near, he held out his hand. I would have taken it in friendly fashion, but he drew it back, threatened a blow, and held it out again. Then I understood him to claim the apple I had flung away, whereupon I made a grimace of dislike and a gesture of rejection.

He answered with a howl of rage that seemed to say ‘Do you dare tell me my apple was not fit to eat?’

‘One bad apple may grow on the best tree,’ I said.

Whether he perceived my meaning I cannot tell, but he made a stride nearer, and I stood on my guard. He delayed his assault, however, until a second giant, much like him, who had been stealing up behind me, was close enough, when he rushed upon me. I met him with a good blow in the face, but the other struck me on the back of the head, and between them I was soon overpowered.

They dragged me into the wood above the valley, where their tribe lived – in wretched huts, built of fallen branches and a few stones. Into one of these they pushed me, there threw me on the ground, and kicked me. A woman was present, who looked on with indifference.

I may here mention that during my captivity I hardly learned to distinguish the women from the men, they differed so little. Often I wondered whether I had not come upon a sort of fungoid people, with just enough mind to give them motion and the expressions of anger and greed. Their food, which consisted of tubers, bulbs, and fruits, was to me inexpressibly disagreeable, but nothing offended them so much as to show dislike to it. I was cuffed by the women and kicked by the men because I would not swallow it.

I lay on the floor that night hardly able to move, but I slept a good deal, and woke a little refreshed. In the morning they dragged me to the valley, and tying my feet, with a long rope, to a tree, put a flat stone with a saw-like edge in my left hand. I shifted it to the right; they kicked me, and put it again in the left; gave me to understand that I was to scrape the bark off every branch that had no fruit on it; kicked me once more, and left me.

I set about the dreary work in the hope that by satisfying them I should be left very much to myself – to make my observations and choose my time for escape. Happily one of the dwarf-trees grew close by me, and every other minute I plucked and ate a small fruit, which wonderfully refreshed and strengthened me.

CHAPTER 13

The Little Ones

I had been at work but a few moments, when I heard small voices near me, and presently the Little Ones, as I soon found they called themselves, came creeping out from among the tiny trees that like brushwood filled the spaces between the big ones. In a minute there were scores and scores about me. I made signs that the giants had but just left me, and were not far off; but they laughed, and told me the wind was quite clean.

'They are too blind to see us,' they said, and laughed like a multitude of sheep-bells.

'Do you like that rope about your ankles?' asked one

'I want them to think I cannot take it off,' I replied.

'They can scarcely see their own feet!' he rejoined. 'Walk with short steps and they will think the rope is all right.'

As he spoke, he danced with merriment.

One of the bigger girls got down on her knees to untie the clumsy knot. I smiled, thinking those pretty fingers could do nothing with it, but in a moment it was loose.

They then made me sit down, and fed me with delicious little fruits; after which the smaller of them began to play with me in the wildest fashion, so that it was impossible for me to resume my work. When the first grew tired, others took their places, and this went on until the sun was setting, and heavy steps were heard approaching. The little people started from me, and I made haste to put the rope round my ankles.

‘We must have a care,’ said the girl who had freed me; ‘a crush of one of their horrid stumpy feet might kill a very little one!’

‘Can they not perceive you at all then?’

‘They might see something move; and if the children were in a heap on the top of you, as they were a moment ago, it would be terrible; for they hate every live thing but themselves. – Not that they are much alive either!’

She whistled like a bird. The next instant not one of them was to be seen or heard, and the girl herself had disappeared.

It was my master, as doubtless he counted himself, come to take me home. He freed my ankles, and dragged me to the door of his hut; there he threw me on the ground, again tied my feet, gave me a kick, and left me.

Now I might at once have made my escape; but at length I had friends, and could not think of leaving them. They were so charming, so full of winsome ways, that I must see more of them! I must know them better! ‘To-morrow,’ I said to myself with delight, ‘I shall see them again!’ But from the moment there was silence in the huts until I fell asleep, I heard them whispering all about me, and knew that I was lovingly watched by a multitude. After that, I think they hardly ever left me quite alone.

I did not come to know the giants at all, and I believe there was scarcely anything in them to know. They never became in the least friendly, but they were much too stupid to invent cruelties. Often I avoided a bad kick by catching the foot and giving its owner a fall, upon which he never, on that occasion renewed his attempt.

But the little people were constantly doing and saying things that pleased, often things that surprised me. Every day I grew more loath to leave them. While I was at work, they would keep coming and going, amusing and delighting me, and taking all the misery, and much of the weariness out of my monotonous toil. Very soon I loved them more than I can tell. They did not know much, but they were very wise, and seemed capable of learning anything. I had no bed save the bare ground, but almost as often as I woke, it was in a nest of children – one or other of them in my arms, though which I seldom could tell until the light came, for they ordered the succession among themselves. When one crept into my bosom, unconsciously I clasped him there, and the rest lay close around me, the smaller nearer. It is hardly necessary to say that I did not suffer much from the nightly cold! The first

thing they did in the morning, and the last before sunset, was to bring the good giant plenty to eat.

One morning I was surprised on waking to find myself alone. As I came to my senses, however, I heard subdued sounds of approach, and presently the girl already mentioned, the tallest and gravest of the community, and regarded by all as their mother, appeared from the wood, followed by the multitude in jubilation manifest – but silent lest they should rouse the sleeping giant at whose door I lay. She carried a boy-baby in her arms: hitherto a girl-baby, apparently about a year old, had been the youngest. Three of the bigger girls were her nurses, but they shared their treasure with all the rest. Among the Little Ones, dolls were unknown; the bigger had the smaller, and the smaller the still less, to tend and play with.

Lona came to me and laid the infant in my arms. The baby opened his eyes and looked at me, closed them again, and fell asleep.

'He loves you already!' said the girl.

'Where did you find him?' I asked.

'In the wood, of course,' she answered, her eyes beaming with delight, '—where we always find them. Isn't he a beauty? We've been out all night looking for him. Sometimes it is not easy to find!'

'How do you know when there is one to find?' I asked.

'I cannot tell,' she replied. 'Every one makes haste to tell the other, but we never find out who told first. Sometimes I think one must have said it asleep, and another heard it half-awake. When there is a baby in the wood, no one can stop to ask questions; and when we have found it, then it is too late.'

'Do more boy or girl babies come to the wood?'

'They don't come to the wood; we go to the wood and find them.'

'Are there more boys or girls of you now?'

I had found that to ask precisely the same question twice, made them knit their brows.

'I do not know,' she answered.

'You can count them, surely!'

'We never do that. We shouldn't like to be counted.'

'Why?'

'It wouldn't be smooth. We would rather not know.'

'Where do the babies come from first?'

‘From the wood – always. There is no other place they can come from.’

She knew where they came from last, and thought nothing else was to be known about their advent.

‘How often do you find one?’

‘Such a happy thing takes all the glad we’ve got, and we forget the last time. You too are glad to have him – are you not, good giant?’

‘Yes, indeed, I am!’ I answered. ‘But how do you feed him?’

‘I will show you,’ she rejoined, and went away – to return directly with two or three ripe little plums. She put one to the baby’s lips.

‘He would open his mouth if he were awake,’ she said, and took him in her arms.

She squeezed a drop to the surface, and again held the fruit to the baby’s lips. Without waking he began at once to suck it, and she went on slowly squeezing until nothing but skin and stone were left.

‘There!’ she cried, in a tone of gentle triumph. ‘A big-apple world it would be with nothing for the babies! We wouldn’t stop in it – would we, darling? We would leave it to the bad giants!’

‘But what if you let the stone into the baby’s mouth when you were feeding him?’ I said.

‘No mother would do that,’ she replied. ‘I shouldn’t be fit to have a baby!’

I thought what a lovely woman she would grow. But what became of them when they grew up? Where did they go? That brought me again to the question – where did they come from first?

‘Will you tell me where you lived before?’ I said.

‘Here,’ she replied.

‘Have you *never* lived anywhere else?’ I ventured.

‘Never. We all came from the wood. Some think we dropped out of the trees.’

‘How is it there are so many of you quite little?’

‘I don’t understand. Some are less and some are bigger. I am very big.’

‘Baby will grow bigger, won’t he?’

‘Of course he will!’

‘And will you grow bigger?’

‘I don’t think so. I hope not. I am the biggest. It frightens me sometimes.’

‘Why should it frighten you?’

She gave me no answer.

‘How old are you?’ I resumed.

‘I do not know what you mean. We are all just that.’

‘How big will the baby grow?’

‘I cannot tell. – Some,’ she added, with a trouble in her voice, ‘begin to grow after we think they have stopped. – That is a frightful thing. We don’t talk about it!’

‘What makes it frightful?’

She was silent for a moment, then answered,

‘We fear they may be beginning to grow giants.’

‘Why should you fear that?’

‘Because it is so terrible – I don’t want to talk about it!’

She pressed the baby to her bosom with such an anxious look that I dared not further question her.

Before long I began to perceive in two or three of the smaller children some traces of greed and selfishness, and noted that the bigger girls cast on these a not infrequent glance of anxiety.

None of them put a hand to my work: they would do nothing for the giants! But they never relaxed their loving ministrations to me. They would sing to me, one after another, for hours; climb the tree to reach my mouth and pop fruit into it with their dainty little fingers; and they kept constant watch against the approach of a giant.

Sometimes they would sit and tell me stories – mostly very childish, and often seeming to mean hardly anything. Now and then they would call a general assembly to amuse me. On one such occasion a moody little fellow sang me a strange crooning song, with a refrain so pathetic that, although unintelligible to me, it caused the tears to run down my face. This phenomenon made those who saw it regard me with much perplexity. Then first I bethought myself that I had not once, in that world, looked on water, falling or lying or running. Plenty there had been in some long vanished age – that was plain enough – but the Little Ones had never seen any before they saw my tears! They had, nevertheless, it seemed, some dim, instinctive perception of their origin; for a very small child went up to the singer, shook his clenched pud in his face, and said something like this: ‘Ou skeeze ze juice out of ze good giant’s seeberries! Bad giant!’

‘How is it,’ I said one day to Lona, as she sat with the baby in her arms at the foot of my tree, ‘that I never see any children among the giants?’

She stared a little, as if looking in vain for some sense in the question, then replied,

‘They are giants; there are no little ones.’

‘Have they never any children?’ I asked.

‘No; there are never any in the wood for them. They do not love them. If they saw ours, they would stamp them.’

‘Is there always the same number of the giants then? I thought, before I had time to know better, that they were your fathers and mothers.’

She burst into the merriest laughter, and said,

‘No, good giant; *we* are *their* firsters.’

But as she said it, the merriment died out of her, and she looked scared.

I stopped working, and gazed at her, bewildered.

‘How *can* that be?’ I exclaimed.

‘I do not say; I do not understand,’ she answered. ‘But we were here and they not. They go from us. I am sorry, but we cannot help it. *They* could have helped it.’

‘How long have you been here?’ I asked, more and more puzzled – in the hope of some side-light on the matter.

‘Always, I think,’ she replied. ‘I think somebody made us always.’

I turned to my scraping.

She saw I did not understand.

‘The giants were not made always,’ she resumed. ‘If a Little One doesn’t care, he grows greedy, and then lazy, and then big, and then stupid, and then bad. The dull creatures don’t know that they come from us. Very few of them believe we are anywhere. They say *Nonsense!* – Look at little Blunty: he is eating one of their apples! He will be the next! Oh! oh! he will soon be big and bad and ugly, and not know it!’

The child stood by himself a little way off, eating an apple nearly as big as his head. I had often thought he did not look so good as the rest; now he looked disgusting.

‘I will take the horrid thing from him!’ I cried.

‘It is no use,’ she answered sadly. ‘We have done all we can, and it is too late! We were afraid he was growing, for he would not believe anything told him; but when he refused to share his berries, and said he had gathered

them for himself, then we knew it! He is a glutton, and there is no hope of him. – It makes me sick to see him eat!'

'Could not some of the boys watch him, and not let him touch the poisonous things?'

'He may have them if he will: it is all one – to eat the apples, and to be a boy that would eat them if he could. No; he must go to the giants! He belongs to them. You can see how much bigger he is than when first you came! He is bigger since yesterday.'

'He is as like that hideous green lump in his hand as boy could look!'

'It suits what he is making himself.'

'His head and it might change places!'

'Perhaps they do!'

'Does he want to be a giant?'

'He hates the giants, but he is making himself one all the same: he likes their apples! Oh baby, baby, he was just such a darling as you when we found him!'

'He will be very miserable when he finds himself a giant!'

'Oh, no; he will like it well enough! That is the worst of it.'

'Will he hate the Little Ones?'

'He will be like the rest; he will not remember us – most likely will not believe there are Little Ones. He will not care, he will eat his apples.'

'Do tell me how it will come about. I understand your world so little! I come from a world where everything is different.'

'I do not know about *world*. What is it? What more but a word in your beautiful big mouth? – That makes it something!'

'Never mind about the word; tell me what next will happen to Blunty.'

'He will wake one morning and find himself a giant – not like you, good giant, but like any other bad giant. You will hardly know him, but I will tell you which. He will think he has been a giant always, and will not know you, or any of us. The giants have lost themselves, Peony says, and that is why they never smile. I wonder whether they are not glad because they are bad, or bad because they are not glad. But they can't be glad when they have no babies! I wonder what *bad* means, good giant!'

'I wish I knew no more about it than you!' I returned. 'But I try to be good, and mean to keep on trying.'

'So do I – and that is how I know you are good.'

A long pause followed.

‘Then you do not know where the babies come from into the wood?’ I said, making one attempt more.

‘There is nothing to know there,’ she answered. ‘They are in the wood; they grow there.’

‘Then how is it you never find one before it is quite grown?’ I asked.

She knitted her brows and was silent a moment:

‘They’re not there till they’re finished,’ she said.

‘It is a pity the little sillies can’t speak till they’ve forgotten everything they had to tell!’ I remarked.

‘Little Tolma, the last before this baby, looked as if she had something to tell, when I found her under a beech-tree, sucking her thumb, but she hadn’t. She only looked up at me – oh, so sweetly! *She* will never go bad and grow big! When they begin to grow big they care for nothing but bigness; and when they cannot grow any bigger, they try to grow fatter. The bad giants are very proud of being fat.’

‘So they are in my world,’ I said, ‘only they do not say *fat* there, they say *rich*.’

‘In one of their houses,’ continued Lona, ‘sits the biggest and fattest of them – so proud that nobody can see him; and the giants go to his house at certain times, and call out to him, and tell him how fat he is, and beg him to make them strong to eat more and grow fat like him.’

The rumour at length reached my ears that Blunty had vanished. I saw a few grave faces among the bigger ones, but he did not seem to be much missed.

The next morning Lona came to me and whispered,

‘Look! look there – by that quince-tree: that is the giant that was Blunty! – Would you have known him?’

‘Never,’ I answered. ‘—But now you tell me, I could fancy it might be Blunty staring through a fog! He *does* look stupid!’

‘He is for ever eating those apples now!’ she said. ‘That is what comes of Little Ones that *won’t* be little!’

‘They call it growing-up in my world!’ I said to myself. ‘If only she would teach me to grow the other way, and become a Little One! – Shall I ever be able to laugh like them?’

I had had the chance, and had flung it from me! Blunty and I were alike! He did not know his loss, and I had to be taught mine!

CHAPTER 14

A Crisis

For a time I had no desire save to spend my life with the Little Ones. But soon other thoughts and feelings began to influence me. First awoke the vague sense that I ought to be doing something; that I was not meant for the fattening of boors! Then it came to me that I was in a marvellous world, of which it was assuredly my business to discover the ways and laws; and that, if I would do anything in return for the children's goodness, I must learn more about them than they could tell me, and to that end must be free. Surely, I thought, no suppression of their growth can be essential to their loveliness and truth and purity! Not in any world could the posssibility exist of such a discord between constitution and its natural outcome! Life and law cannot be so at variance that perfection must be gained by thwarting development! But the growth of the Little Ones *was* arrested! something interfered with it: what was it? Lona seemed the eldest of them, yet not more than fifteen, and had been long in charge of a multitude, in semblance and mostly in behaviour merest children, who regarded her as their mother! Were they growing at all? I doubted it. Of time they had scarcely the idea, of their own age they knew nothing! Lona herself thought she had lived always! Full of wisdom and empty of knowledge, she was at once their Love and their Law! But what seemed to me her ignorance might in truth be my own lack of insight! Her one anxiety plainly was, that her Little Ones should not grow, and change into bad giants! Their 'good giant' was bound to do his best for them: without more knowledge of their nature, and some knowledge of their history, he could do nothing, and must therefore leave

them! They would only be as they were before; they had in no way become dependent on me, they were still my protectors, I was not theirs; my presence but brought them more in danger of their idiotic neighbours! I longed to teach them many things: I must first understand more of those I would teach! Knowledge no doubt made bad people worse, but it must make good people better! I was convinced they would learn mathematics; and might they not be taught to write down the dainty melodies they murmured and forgot?

The conclusion was, that I must rise and continue my travels, in the hope of coming upon some elucidation of the fortunes and destiny of the bewitching little creatures.

My design, however, would not so soon have passed into action, but for what now occurred.

To prepare them for my temporary absence, I was one day telling them while at work that I would long ago have left the bad giants, but that I loved the Little Ones so much – when, as by one accord, they came rushing and crowding upon me; they scrambled over each other and up the tree and dropped on my head, until I was nearly smothered. With three very little ones in my arms, one on each shoulder clinging to my neck, one standing straight up on my head, four or five holding me fast by the legs, others grappling my body and arms, and a multitude climbing and descending upon these, I was helpless as one overwhelmed by lava. Absorbed in the merry struggle, not one of them saw my tyrant coming until he was almost upon me. With just one cry of ‘Take care, good giant!’ they ran from me like mice, they dropped from me like hedgehogs, they flew from me up the tree like squirrels, and the same moment, sharp round the stem came the bad giant, and dealt me such a blow on the head with a stick that I fell to the ground. The children told me afterwards that they sent him ‘such a many bumps of big apples and stones’ that he was frightened, and ran blundering home.

When I came to myself it was night. Above me were a few pale stars that expected the moon. I thought I was alone. My head ached badly, and I was terribly athirst.

I turned wearily on my side. The moment my ear touched the ground, I heard the gushing and gurgling of water, and the soft noises made me groan with longing. At once I was amid a multitude of silent children, and

delicious little fruits began to visit my lips. They came and came until my thirst was gone.

Then I was aware of sounds I had never heard there before; the air was full of little sobs.

I tried to sit up. A pile of small bodies instantly heaped itself at my back. Then I struggled to my feet, with much pushing and pulling from the Little Ones, who were wonderfully strong for their size.

'You must go away, good giant,' they said. 'When the bad giants see you hurt, they will all trample on you.'

'I think I must,' I answered.

'Go and grow strong, and come again,' they said.

'I will,' I replied – and sat down.

'Indeed you must go at once!' whispered Lona, who had been supporting me, and now knelt beside me.

'I listened at his door,' said one of the bigger boys, 'and heard the bad giant say to his wife that he had found you idle, talking to a lot of moles and squirrels, and when he beat you, they tried to kill him. He said you were a wizard, and they must knock you, or they would have no peace.'

'I will go at once,' I said, 'and come back as soon as I have found out what is wanted to make you bigger and stronger.'

'We don't want to be bigger,' they answered, looking very serious. 'We *won't* grow bad giants! – We are strong now; you don't know how much strong!'

It was no use holding them out a prospect that had not any attraction for them! I said nothing more, but rose and moved slowly up the slope of the valley. At once they formed themselves into a long procession; some led the way, some walked with me helping me, and the rest followed. They kept feeding me as we went.

'You are broken,' they said, 'and much red juice has run out of you: put some in.'

When we reached the edge of the valley, there was the moon just lifting her forehead over the rim of the horizon.

'She has come to take care of you, and show you the way,' said Lona.

I questioned those about me as we walked, and learned there was a great place with a giant-girl for queen. When I asked if it was a city, they said they did not know. Neither could they tell how far off, or in what direction

it was, or what was the giant-girl's name; all they knew was, that she hated the Little Ones, and would like to kill them, only she could not find them. I asked how they knew that; Lona answered that she had always known it. If the giant-girl came to look for them, they must hide hard, she said. When I told them I should go arid ask her why she hated them, they cried out,

'No, no! she will kill you, good giant; she will kill you! She is an awful bad-giant witch!'

I asked them where I was to go then. They told me that, beyond the baby-forest, away where the moon come from, lay a smooth green country, pleasant to the feet, without rocks or trees. But when I asked how I was to set out for it,

'The moon will tell you, we think,' they said.

They were taking me up the second branch of the river bed: when they saw that the moon had reached her height, they stopped to return.

'We have never gone so far from our trees before,' they said. 'Now mind you watch how you go, that you may see inside your eyes how to come back to us.'

'And beware of the giant-woman that lives in the desert,' said one of the bigger girls as they were turning. 'I suppose you have heard of her!'

'No,' I answered.

'Then take care not to go near her. She is called the Cat-woman. She is awfully ugly – *and scratches*.'

As soon as the bigger ones stopped, the smaller had begun to run back. The others now looked at me gravely for a moment, and then walked slowly away. Last to leave me, Lona held up the baby to be kissed, gazed in my eyes, whispered. 'The Cat-woman will not hurt *you*,' and went without another word. I stood a while, gazing after them through the moonlight, then turned and, with a heavy heart, began my solitary journey. Soon the laughter of the Little Ones overtook me, like sheep-bells innumerable, rippling the air, and echoing in the rocks about me. I turned again, and again gazed after them: they went gamboling along, with never a care in their sweet souls. But Lona walked apart with her baby.

Pondering as I went, I recalled many traits of my little friends.

Once when I suggested that they should leave the country of the bad giants, and go with me to find another, they answered, 'But that would be to *not* ourselves!' – so strong in them was the love of place that their country

seemed essential to their very being! Without ambition or fear, discomfort or greed, they had no motive to desire any change; they knew of nothing amiss; and, except their babies, they had never had a chance of helping any one but myself: – How were they to grow? But again, Why should they grow? In seeking to improve their conditions, might I not do them harm, and only harm? To enlarge their minds after the notions of my world – might it not be to distort and weaken them? Their fear of growth as a possible start for gianthood might be instinctive!

The part of philanthropist is indeed a dangerous one; and the man who would do his neighbour good must first study how not to do him evil, and must begin by pulling the beam out of his own eye.

CHAPTER 15

A Strange Hostess

I travelled on attended by the moon. As usual she was full – I had never seen her other – and to-night as she sank I thought I perceived something like a smile on her countenance.

When her under edge was a little below the horizon, there appeared in the middle of her disc, as if it had been painted upon it, a cottage, through the open door and window of which she shone; and with the sight came the conviction that I was expected there. Almost immediately the moon was gone, and the cottage had vanished; the night was rapidly growing dark, and my way being across a close succession of small ravines, I resolved to remain where I was and expect the morning. I stretched myself, therefore, in a sandy hollow, made my supper off the fruits the children had given me at parting, and was soon asleep.

I woke suddenly, saw above me constellations unknown to my former world, and had lain for a while gazing at them, when I became aware of a figure seated on the ground a little way from and above me. I was startled, as one is on discovering all at once that he is not alone. The figure was between me and the sky, so that I saw its outline well. From where I lay low in the hollow, it seemed larger than human.

It moved its head, and then first I saw that its back was toward me.

‘Will you not come with me?’ said a sweet, mellow voice, unmistakably a woman’s.

Wishing to learn more of my hostess,

‘I thank you,’ I replied, ‘but I am not uncomfortable here. Where would you have me go? I like sleeping in the open air.’

‘There is no hurt in the air,’ she returned; ‘but the creatures that roam the night in these parts are not such as a man would willingly have about him while he sleeps.’

‘I have not been disturbed,’ I said.

‘No; I have been sitting by you ever since you lay down.’

‘That is very kind of you! How came you to know I was here? Why do you show me such favour?’

‘I saw you,’ she answered, still with her back to me, ‘in the light of the moon, just as she went down. I see badly in the day, but at night perfectly. The shadow of my house would have hidden you, but both its doors were open. I was out on the waste, and saw you go into this hollow. You were asleep, however, before I could reach you, and I was not willing to disturb you. People are frightened if I come on them suddenly. They call me the Cat-woman. It is not my name.’

I remembered what the children had told me – that she was very ugly, and scratched. But her voice was gentle, and its tone a little apologetic: she could not be a bad giantess!

‘You shall not hear it from me,’ I answered. ‘Please tell me what I *may* call you!’

‘When you know me, call me by the name that seems to you to fit me,’ she replied: ‘that will tell me what sort you are. People do not often give me the right one. It is well when they do.’

‘I suppose, madam, you live in the cottage I saw in the heart of the moon?’

‘I do. I live there alone, except when I have visitors. It is a poor place, but I do what I can for my guests, and sometimes their sleep is sweet to them.’

Her voice entered into me, and made me feel strangely still.

‘I will go with you, madam,’ I said, rising.

She rose at once, and without a glance behind her led the way. I could see her just well enough to follow. She was taller than myself, but not so tall as I had thought her. That she never turned her face to me made me curious – nowise apprehensive, her voice rang so true. But how was I to fit her with a name who could not see her? I strove to get alongside of her, but failed:

when I quickened my pace she quickened hers, and kept easily ahead of me. At length I did begin to grow a little afraid. Why was she so careful not to be seen? Extraordinary ugliness would account for it: she might fear terrifying me! Horror of an inconceivable monstrosity began to assail me: was I following through the dark an unheard of hideousness? Almost I repented of having accepted her hospitality.

Neither spoke, and the silence grew unbearable. I *must* break it!

'I want to find my way,' I said, 'to a place I have heard of, but whose name I have not yet learned. Perhaps you can tell it me!'

'Describe it, then, and I will direct you. The stupid Bags know nothing, and the careless little Lovers forget almost everything.'

'Where do those live?'

'You are just come from them!'

'I never heard those names before!'

'You would not hear them. Neither people knows its own name!'

'Strange!'

'Perhaps so! but hardly any one anywhere knows his own name! It would make many a fine gentleman stare to hear himself addressed by what is really his name!'

I held my peace, beginning to wonder what my name might be.

'What now do you fancy yours?' she went on, as if aware of my thought. 'But, pardon me, it is a matter of no consequence.'

I had actually opened my mouth to answer her, when I discovered that my name was gone from me. I could not even recall the first letter of it! This was the second time I had been asked my name and could not tell it!

'Never mind,' she said; 'it is not wanted. Your real name, indeed, is written on your forehead, but at present it whirls about so irregularly that nobody can read it. I will do my part to steady it. Soon it will go slower, and, I hope, settle at last.'

This startled me, and I was silent.

We had left the channels and walked a long time, but no sign of the cottage yet appeared.

'The Little Ones told me,' I said at length, 'of a smooth green country, pleasant to the feet!'

'Yes?' she returned.

‘They told me too of a girl giantess that was queen somewhere: is that her country?’

‘There is a city in that grassy land,’ she replied, ‘where a woman is princess. The city is called Bulika. But certainly the princess is not a girl! She is older than this world, and came to it from yours – with a terrible history, which is not over yet. She is an evil person, and prevails much with the Prince of the Power of the Air. The people of Bulika were formerly simple folk, tilling the ground and pasturing sheep. She came among them, and they received her hospitably. She taught them to dig for diamonds and opals and sell them to strangers, and made them give up tillage and pasturage and build a city. One day they found a huge snake and killed it; which so enraged her that she declared herself their princess, and became terrible to them. The name of the country at that time was *The Land of Waters*; for the dry channels, of which you have crossed so many, were then overflowing with live torrents; and the valley, where now the Bags and the Lovers have their fruit-trees, was a lake that received a great part of them. But the wicked princess gathered up in her lap what she could of the water over the whole country, closed it in an egg, and carried it away. Her lap, however, would not hold more than half of it; and the instant she was gone, what she had not yet taken fled away underground, leaving the country as dry and dusty as her own heart. Were it not for the waters under it, every living thing would long ago have perished from it. For where no water is, no rain falls; and where no rain falls, no springs rise. Ever since then, the princess has lived in Bulika, holding the inhabitants in constant terror, and doing what she can to keep them from multiplying. Yet they boast and believe themselves a prosperous and certainly are a self-satisfied people – good at bargaining and buying, good at selling and cheating; holding well together for a common interest, and utterly treacherous where interests clash; proud of their princess and her power, and despising every one they get the better of; never doubting themselves the most honourable of all the nations, and each man counting himself better than any other. The depth of their worthlessness and height of their vain-glory no one can understand who has not been there to see, who has not learned to know the miserable misgoverned and self-deceived creatures.’

‘I thank you, madam. And now, if you please, will you tell me something about the Little Ones – the Lovers? I long heartily to serve them. Who and

what are they? and how do they come to be there? Those children are the greatest wonder I have found in this world of wonders.'

'In Bulika you may, perhaps, get some light on those matters. There is an ancient poem in the library of the palace, I am told, which of course no one there can read, but in which it is plainly written that after the Lovers have gone through great troubles and learned their own name, they will fill the land, and make the giants their slaves.'

'By that time they will have grown a little, will they not?' I said.

'Yes, they will have grown; yet I think too they will not have grown. It is possible to grow and not to grow, to grow less and to grow bigger, both at once – yes, even to grow by means of not growing!'

'Your words are strange, madam!' I rejoined. 'But I have heard it said that some words, because they mean more, appear to mean less!'

'That is true, and such words *have* to be understood. It were well for the princess of Bulika if she heard what the very silence of the land is shouting in her ears all day long! But she is far too clever to understand anything.'

'Then I suppose, when the little Lovers are grown, their land will have water again?'

'Not exactly so: when they are thirsty enough, they will have water, and when they have water, they will grow. To grow, they must have water. And, beneath, it is flowing still.'

'I have heard that water twice,' I said; '—once when I lay down to wait for the moon – and when I woke the sun was shining! and once when I fell, all but killed by the bad giant. Both times came the voices of the water, and healed me.'

The woman never turned her head, and kept always a little before me, but I could hear every word that left her lips, and her voice much reminded me of the woman's in the house of death. Much of what she said, I did not understand, and therefore cannot remember. But I forgot that I had ever been afraid of her.

We went on and on, and crossed yet a wide tract of sand before reaching the cottage. Its foundation stood in deep sand, but I could see that it was a rock. In character the cottage resembled the sexton's, but had thicker walls. The door, which was heavy and strong, opened immediately into a large bare room, which had two little windows opposite each other, without glass. My hostess walked in at the open door out of which the moon had looked,

and going straight to the farthest corner, took a long white cloth from the floor, and wound it about her head and face. Then she closed the other door, in at which the moon had looked, trimmed a small horn lantern that stood on the hearth, and turned to receive me.

'You are very welcome, Mr Vane!' she said, calling me by the name I had forgotten. 'Your entertainment will be scanty, but, as the night is not far spent, and the day not at hand, it is better you should be indoors. Here you will be safe, and a little lack is not a great misery.'

'I thank you heartily, madam,' I replied. 'But, seeing you know the name I could not tell you, may I not know yours?'

'My name is Mara,' she answered.

Then I remembered the sexton and the little black cat.

'Some people,' she went on, 'take me for Lot's wife, lamenting over Sodom; and some think I am Rachel, weeping for her children; but I am neither of those.'

'I thank you again, Mara,' I said. '—May I lie here on your floor till the morning?'

'At the top of that stair,' she answered, 'you will find a bed – on which some have slept better than they expected, and some have waked all the night and slept all the next day. It is not a very soft one, but it is better than the sand – and there are no hyenas sniffing about it!'

The stair, narrow and steep, led straight up from the room to an unceiled and unpartitioned garret, with one wide, low dormer window. Close under the sloping roof stood a narrow bed, the sight of which with its white coverlet made me shiver, so vividly it recalled the couches in the chamber of death. On the table was a dry loaf, and beside it a cup of cold water. To me, who had tasted nothing but fruit for months, they were a feast.

'I must leave you in the dark,' my hostess called from the bottom of the stair. 'This lantern is all the light I have, and there are things to do to-night.'

'It is of no consequence, thank you, madam,' I returned. 'To eat and drink, to lie down and sleep, are things that can be done in the dark.'

'Rest in peace,' she said.

I ate up the loaf, drank the water every drop, and laid myself down. The bed was hard, the covering thin and scanty, and the night cold: I dreamed that I lay in the chamber of death, between the warrior and the lady with the healing wound.

I woke in the middle of the night, thinking I heard low noises of wild animals.

‘Creatures of the desert scenting after me, I suppose!’ I said to myself, and, knowing I was safe, would have gone to sleep again. But that instant a rough purring rose to a howl under my window, and I sprang from my bed to see what sort of beast uttered it.

Before the door of the cottage, in the full radiance of the moon, a tall woman stood, clothed in white, with her back toward me. She was stooping over a large white animal like a panther, patting and stroking it with one hand, while with the other she pointed to the moon half-way up the heaven, then drew a perpendicular line to the horizon. Instantly the creature darted off with amazing swiftness in the direction indicated. For a moment my eyes followed it, then sought the woman; but she was gone, and not yet had I seen her face! Again I looked after the animal, but whether I saw or only fancied a white speck in the distance, I could not tell. – What did it mean? What was the monster-cat sent off to do? I shuddered, and went back to my bed. Then I remembered that, when I lay down in the sandy hollow outside, the moon was setting; yet here she was, a few hours after, shining in all her glory! ‘Everything is uncertain here,’ I said to myself, ‘—even the motions of the heavenly bodies!’

I learned afterwards that there were several moons in the service of this world, but the laws that ruled their times and different orbits I failed to discover.

Again I fell asleep, and slept undisturbed.

When I went down in the morning, I found bread and water waiting me, the loaf so large that I ate only half of it. My hostess sat muffled beside me while I broke my fast, and except to greet me when I entered, never opened her mouth until I asked her to instruct me how to arrive at Bulika. She then told me to go up the bank of the river-bed until it disappeared; then verge to the right until I came to a forest – in which I might spend a night, but which I must leave with my face to the rising moon. Keeping in the same direction, she said, until I reached a running stream, I must cross that at right angles, and go straight on until I saw the city on the horizon.

I thanked her, and ventured the remark that, looking out of the window in the night, I was astonished to see her messenger understand her so well, and go so straight and so fast in the direction she had indicated.

‘If I had but that animal of yours to guide me—’ I went on, hoping to learn something of its mission, but she interrupted me, saying,

‘It was to Bulika she went – the shortest way.’

‘How wonderfully intelligent she looked!’

‘Astarte knows her work well enough to be sent to do it,’ she answered.

‘Have you many messengers like her?’

‘As many as I require.’

‘Are they hard to teach?’

‘They need no teaching. They are all of a certain breed, but not one of the breed is like another. Their origin is so natural it would seem to you incredible.’

‘May I not know it?’

‘A new one came to me last night – from your head while you slept.’

I laughed.

‘All in this world seem to love mystery!’ I said to myself. ‘Some chance word of mine suggested an idea – and in this form she embodies the small fact!’

‘Then the creature is mine!’ I cried.

‘Not at all!’ she answered. ‘That only can be ours in whose existence our will is a factor.’

‘Ha! a metaphysician too!’ I remarked inside, and was silent.

‘May I take what is left of the loaf?’ I asked presently.

‘You will want no more to-day,’ she replied.

‘To-morrow I may!’ I rejoined.

She rose and went to the door, saying as she went,

‘It has nothing to do with to-morrow – but you may take it if you will.’

She opened the door, and stood holding it. I rose, taking up the bread – but lingered, much desiring to see her face.

‘Must I go, then?’ I asked.

‘No one sleeps in my house two nights together!’ she answered.

‘I thank you, then, for your hospitality, and bid you farewell!’ I said, and turned to go.

‘The time will come when you must house with me many days and many nights,’ she murmured sadly through her muffling.

‘Willingly,’ I replied.

‘Nay, *not* willingly!’ she answered.

I said to myself that she was right – I would not willingly be her guest a second time! but immediately my heart rebuked me, and I had scarce crossed the threshold when I turned again.

She stood in the middle of the room; her white garments lay like foamy waves at her feet, and among them the swathings of her face: it was lovely as a night of stars. Her great gray eyes looked up to heaven; tears were flowing down her pale cheeks. She reminded me not a little of the sexton's wife, although the one looked as if she had not wept for thousands of years, and the other as if she wept constantly behind the wrappings of her beautiful head. Yet something in the very eyes that wept seemed to say, 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'

I had bowed my head for a moment, about to kneel and beg her forgiveness, when, looking up in the act, I found myself outside a doorless house. I went round and round it, but could find no entrance.

I had stopped under one of the windows, on the point of calling aloud my repentant confession, when a sudden wailing, howling scream invaded my ears, and my heart stood still. Something sprang from the window above my head, and lighted beyond me. I turned, and saw a large gray cat, its hair on end, shooting toward the river-bed. I fell with my face in the sand, and seemed to hear within the house the gentle sobbing of one who suffered but did not repent.

CHAPTER 16

A Gruesome Dance

I rose to resume my journey, and walked many a desert mile. How I longed for a mountain, or even a tall rock, from whose summit I might see across the dismal plain or the dried-up channels to some bordering hope! Yet what could such foresight have availed me? That which is within a man, not that which lies beyond his vision, is the main factor in what is about to befall him: the operation upon him is the event. Foreseeing is not understanding, else surely the prophecy latent in man would come oftener to the surface!

The sun was half-way to the horizon when I saw before me a rugged rocky ascent; but ere I reached it my desire to climb was over, and I longed to lie down. By that time the sun was almost set, and the air had begun to grow dark. At my feet lay a carpet of softest, greenest moss, couch for a king: I threw myself upon it, and weariness at once began to ebb, for, the moment my head was down, the third time I heard below me many waters, playing broken airs and ethereal harmonies with the stones of their buried channels. Loveliest chaos of music-stuff the harp aquarian kept sending up to my ears! What might not a Handel have done with that ever-recurring gurgle and bell-like drip, to the mingling and mutually destructive melodies their common refrain!

As I lay listening, my eyes went wandering up and down the rocky slope abrupt above me, reading on its face the record that down there, ages ago, rushed a cataract, filling the channels that had led me to its foot. My heart swelled at the thought of the splendid tumult, where the waves danced revelling in helpless fall, to mass their music in one organ-roar below. But

soon the hidden brooks lulled me to sleep, and their lullabies mingled with my dreams.

I woke before the sun, and eagerly climbed to see what lay beyond. Alas, nothing but a desert of finest sand! Not a trace was left of the river that had plunged adown the rocks! The powdery drift had filled its course to the level of the dreary expanse! As I looked back I saw that the river had divided into two branches as it fell, that whose bank I had now followed to the foot of the rocky scaur, and that which first I crossed to the Evil Wood. The wood I descried between the two on the far horizon. Before me and to the left, the desert stretched beyond my vision, but far to the right I could see a lift in the sky-line, giving hope of the forest to which my hostess had directed me.

I sat down, and sought in my pocket the half-loaf I had brought with me – then first to understand what my hostess had meant concerning it. Verily the bread was not for the morrow: it had shrunk and hardened to a stone! I threw it away, and set out again.

About noon I came to a few tamarisk and juniper trees, and then to a few stunted firs. As I went on, closer thickets and larger firs met me, and at length I was in just such a forest of pines and other trees as that in which the Little Ones found their babies, and believed I had returned upon a farther portion of the same. But what mattered *where* while *everywhere* was the same as *nowhere*! I had not yet, by doing something in it, made *anywhere* into a place! I was not yet alive; I was only dreaming I lived! I was but a consciousness with an outlook! Truly I had been nothing else in the world I had left, but now I knew the fact! I said to myself that if in this forest I should catch the faint gleam of the mirror, I would turn far aside lest it should entrap me unawares, and give me back to my old existence: here I might learn to be something by doing something! I could not endure the thought of going back, with so many beginnings and not an end achieved. The Little Ones would meet what fate was appointed them; the awful witch I should never meet; the dead would ripen and arise without me; I should but wake to know that I had dreamed, and that all my going was nowhither! I would rather go on and on than come to such a close!

I went deeper into the wood: I was weary, and would rest in it.

The trees were now large, and stood in regular, almost geometric, fashion, with roomy spaces between. There was little undergrowth, and I

could see a long way in every direction. The forest was like a great church, solemn and silent and empty, for I met nothing on two feet or four that day. Now and then, it is true, some swift thing, and again some slow thing, would cross the space on which my eye happened that moment to settle; but it was always at some distance, and only enhanced the sense of wideness and vacancy. I heard a few birds, and saw plenty of butterflies, some of marvellously gorgeous colouring and combinations of colour, some of a pure and dazzling whiteness.

Coming to a spot where the pines stood farther apart and gave room for flowering shrubs, and hoping it a sign of some dwelling near, I took the direction where yet more and more roses grew, for I was hungry after the voice and face of my kind – after any live soul, indeed, human or not, which I might in some measure understand. What a hell of horror, I thought, to wander alone, a bare existence never going out of itself, never widening its life in another life, but, bound with the cords of its poor peculiarities, lying an eternal prisoner in the dungeon of its own being! I began to learn that it was impossible to live for oneself even, save in the presence of others – then, alas, fearfully possible! evil was only through good! selfishness but a parasite on the tree of life! In my own world I had the habit of solitary song; here not a crooning murmur ever parted my lips! There I sang without thinking; here I thought without singing! there I had never had a bosom-friend; here the affection of an idiot would be divinely welcome! ‘If only I had a dog to love!’ I sighed – and regarded with wonder my past self, which preferred the company of book or pen to that of man or woman; which, if the author of a tale I was enjoying appeared, would wish him away that I might return to his story. I had chosen the dead rather than the living, the thing thought rather than the thing thinking! ‘Any man,’ I said now, ‘is more than the greatest of books!’ I had not cared for my live brothers and sisters, and now I was left without even the dead to comfort me!

The wood thinned yet more, and the pines grew yet larger, sending up huge stems, like columns eager to support the heavens. More trees of other kinds appeared; the forest was growing richer! The roses were now trees, and their flowers of astonishing splendour.

Suddenly I spied what seemed a great house or castle; but its forms were so strangely indistinct, that I could not be certain it was more than a chance combination of tree-shapes. As I drew nearer, its lines yet held together, but

neither they nor the body of it grew at all more definite; and when at length I stood in front of it, I remained as doubtful of its nature as before. House or castle habitable, it certainly was not; it might be a ruin overgrown with ivy and roses! Yet of building hid in the foliage, not the poorest wall-remnant could I discern. Again and again I seemed to descry what must be building, but it always vanished before closer inspection. Could it be, I pondered, that the ivy had embraced a huge edifice and consumed it, and its interlaced branches retained the shapes of the walls it had assimilated? – I could be sure of nothing concerning the appearance.

Before me was a rectangular vacancy – the ghost of a doorway without a door: I stepped through it, and found myself in an open space like a great hall, its floor covered with grass and flowers, its walls and roof of ivy and vine, mingled with roses.

There could be no better place in which to pass the night! I gathered a quantity of withered leaves, laid them in a corner, and threw myself upon them. A red sunset filled the hall, the night was warm, and my couch restful; I lay gazing up at the live ceiling, with its tracery of branches and twigs, its clouds of foliage, and peeping patches of loftier roof. My eyes went wading about as if tangled in it, until the sun was down, and the sky beginning to grow dark. Then the red roses turned black, and soon the yellow and white alone were visible. When they vanished, the stars came instead, hanging in the leaves like live topazes, throbbing and sparkling and flashing many colours: I was canopied with a tree from Aladdin's cave!

Then I discovered that it was full of nests, whence tiny heads, nearly indistinguishable, kept popping out with a chirp or two, and disappearing again. For a while there were rustlings and stirrings and little prayers; but as the darkness grew, the small heads became still, and at last every feathered mother had her brood quiet under her wings, the talk in the little beds was over, and God's bird-nursery at rest beneath the waves of sleep. Once more a few flutterings made me look up: an owl went sailing across. I had only a glimpse of him, but several times felt the cool wafture of his silent wings. The mother birds did not move again; they saw that he was looking for mice, not children.

About midnight I came wide awake, roused by a revelry, whose noises were not yet loud. Neither were they distant; they were close to me, but

attenuate. My eyes were so dazzled, however, that for a while I could see nothing; at last they came to themselves.

I was lying on my withered leaves in the corner of a splendid hall. Before me was a crowd of gorgeously dressed men and gracefully robed women, none of whom seemed to see me. In dance after dance they vaguely embodied the story of life, its meetings, its passions, its partings. A student of Shakespeare, I had learned something of every dance alluded to in his plays, and hence partially understood several of those I now saw – the minuet, the pavin, the hey, the coranto, the lavolta. The dancers were attired in fashion as ancient as their dances.

A moon had risen while I slept, and was shining through the countless-windowed roof; but her light was crossed by so many shadows that at first I could distinguish almost nothing of the faces of the multitude; I could not fail, however, to perceive that there was something odd about them: I sat up to see them better. – Heavens! could I call them faces? They were skull fronts! – hard, gleaming bone, bare jaws, truncated noses, lipless teeth which could no more take part in any smile! Of these, some flashed set and white and murderous; others were clouded with decay, broken and gapped, coloured of the earth in which they seemed so long to have lain! Fearfuller yet, the eye-sockets were not empty; in each was a lidless living eye! In those wrecks of faces, glowed or flashed or sparkled eyes of every colour, shape, and expression. The beautiful, proud eye, dark and lustrous, condescending to whatever it rested upon, was the more terrible; the lovely, languishing eye, the more repulsive; while the dim, sad eyes, less at variance with their setting, were sad exceedingly, and drew the heart in spite of the horror out of which they gazed.

I rose and went among the apparitions, eager to understand something of their being and belongings. Were they souls, or were they and their rhythmic motions but phantasms of what had been? By look nor by gesture, not by slightest break in the measure, did they show themselves aware of me; I was not present to them: how much were they in relation to each other? Surely they saw their companions as I saw them! Or was each only dreaming itself and the rest? Did they know each how they appeared to the others – a death with living eyes? Had they used their faces, not for communication, not to utter thought and feeling, not to share existence with their neighbours, but to appear what they wished to appear, and conceal

what they were? and, having made their faces masks, were they therefore deprived of those masks, and condemned to go without faces until they repented?

'How long must they flaunt their facelessness in faceless eyes?' I wondered. 'How long will the frightful punition endure? Have they at length begun to love and be wise? Have they yet yielded to the shame that has found them?'

I heard not a word, saw not a movement of one naked mouth. Were they because of lying bereft of speech? With their eyes they spoke as if longing to be understood: was it truth or was it falsehood that spoke in their eyes? They seemed to know one another: did they see one skull beautiful, and another plain? Difference must be there, and they had had long study of skulls!

My body was to theirs no obstacle: was I a body, and were they but forms? or was I but a form, and were they bodies? The moment one of the dancers came close against me, that moment he or she was on the other side of me, and I could tell, without seeing, which, whether man or woman, had passed through my house.

On many of the skulls the hair held its place, and however dressed, or in itself however beautiful, to my eyes looked frightful on the bones of the forehead and temples. In such case, the outer ear often remained also, and at its tip, the jewel of the ear as Sidney calls it, would hang, glimmering, gleaming, or sparkling, pearl or opal or diamond – under the night of brown or of raven locks, the sunrise of golden ripples, or the moonshine of pale, interclouded, fluffy cirri – lichenous all on the ivory-white or damp-yellow naked bone. I looked down and saw the daintily domed instep; I looked up and saw the plump shoulders basing the spring of the round full neck – which withered at half-height to the fluted shaft of a gibbose cranium.

The music became wilder, the dance faster and faster; eyes flared and flashed, jewels twinkled and glittered, casting colour and fire on the pallid grins that glode through the hall, weaving a ghastly rhythmic woof in intricate maze of multitudinous motion, when sudden came a pause, and every eye turned to the same spot: – in the doorway stood a woman, perfect in form, in holding, and in hue, regarding the company as from the pedestal of a goddess, while the dancers stood 'like one forbid,' frozen to a new death by the vision of a life that killed. 'Dead things, I live!' said her

scornful glance. Then, at once, like leaves in which an instant wind awakes, they turned each to another, and broke afresh into melodious consorted motion, a new expression in their eyes, late solitary, now filled with the interchange of a common triumph. ‘Thou also,’ they seemed to say, ‘wilt soon become weak as we! thou wilt soon become like unto us!’ I turned mine again to the woman – and saw upon her side a small dark shadow.

She had seen the change in the dead stare; she looked down; she understood the talking eyes; she pressed both her lovely hands on the shadow, gave a smothered cry, and fled. The birds moved rustling in their nests, and a flash of joy lit up the eyes of the dancers, when suddenly a warm wind, growing in strength as it swept through the place, blew out every light. But the low moon yet glimmered on the horizon with ‘sick assay’ to shine, and a turbid radiance yet gleamed from so many eyes, that I saw well enough what followed. As if each shape had been but a snow-image, it began to fall to pieces, ruining in the warm wind. In papery flakes the flesh peeled from its bones, dropping like soiled snow from under its garments; these fell fluttering in rags and strips, and the whole white skeleton, emerging from garment and flesh together, stood bare and lank amid the decay that littered the floor. A faint rattling shiver went through the naked company; pair after pair the lamping eyes went out, and the darkness grew round me with the loneliness. For a moment the leaves were still swept fluttering all one way; then the wind ceased, and the owl floated silent through the silent night.

Not for a moment had I been afraid. It is true that whoever would cross the threshold of any world, must leave fear behind him; but, for myself, I could claim no part in its absence. No conscious courage was operant in me; simply, I was not afraid. I neither knew why I was not afraid, nor wherefore I might have been afraid. I feared not even fear – which of all dangers is the most dangerous.

I went out into the wood, at once to resume my journey. Another moon was rising, and I turned my face toward it.

CHAPTER 17

A Grotesque Tragedy

I had not gone ten paces when I caught sight of a strange-looking object, and went nearer to know what it might be. I found it a mouldering carriage of ancient form, ruinous but still upright on its heavy wheels. On each side of the pole, still in its place, lay the skeleton of a horse; from their two grim white heads ascended the shrivelled reins to the hand of the skeleton-coachman seated on his tattered hammer-cloth; both doors had fallen away; within sat two skeletons, each leaning back in its corner.

Even as I looked, they started awake, and with a cracking rattle of bones, each leaped from the door next it. One fell and lay; the other stood a moment, its structure shaking perilously; then with difficulty, for its joints were stiff, crept, holding by the back of the carriage, to the opposite side, the thin leg-bones seeming hardly strong enough to carry its weight, where, kneeling by the other, it sought to raise it, almost falling itself again in the endeavour.

The prostrate one rose at length, as by a sudden effort, to the sitting posture. For a few moments it turned its yellowish skull to this side and that; then, heedless of its neighbour, got upon its feet by grasping the spokes of the hind wheel. Half erected thus, it stood with its back to the other, both hands holding one of its knee-joints. With little less difficulty and not a few contortions, the kneeling one rose next, and addressed its companion.

‘Have you hurt yourself, my lord?’ it said, in a voice that sounded far-off, and ill-articulated as if blown aside by some spectral wind.

‘Yes, I have,’ answered the other, in like but rougher tone. ‘You would do nothing to help me, and this cursed knee is out!’

‘I did my best, my lord.’

‘No doubt, my lady, for it was bad! I thought I should never find my feet again! – But, bless my soul, madam! are you out on your bones?’

She cast a look at herself.

‘I have nothing else to be out in,’ she returned; ‘—and *you* at least cannot complain! But what on earth does it mean? Am I dreaming?’

‘*You* may be dreaming, madam – I cannot tell; but this knee of mine forbids me the grateful illusion. – Ha! I too, I perceive, have nothing to walk in but bones! – Not so unbecoming to a man, however! I trust to goodness that they are not *my* bones! every one aches worse than another, and this loose knee worst of all! The bed must have been damp – and I too drunk to know it!’

‘Probably, my lord of Cokayne!’

‘What! what! – You make me think I too am dreaming – aches and all! How do *you* know the title my roistering bullies give me? I don’t remember you! – Anyhow, you have no right to take liberties! My name is – I am lord – tut, tut! What do you call me when I’m – I mean when you are sober? I cannot – at the moment, – Why, what *is* my name? – I must have been *very* drunk when I went to bed! I often am!’

‘You come so seldom to mine, that I do not know, my lord; but I may take your word for *that*!’

‘I hope so!’

‘—if for nothing else!’

‘Hoity toity! I never told you a lie in my life!’

‘You never told me anything but lies.’

‘Upon my honour! – Why, I never saw the woman before!’

‘You knew me well enough to lie to, my lord!’

‘I do seem to begin to dream I have met you before, but, upon my oath, there is nothing to know you by! Out of your clothes, who is to tell who you may not be? – One thing I *may* swear – that I never saw you so much undressed before! – By heaven, I have no recollection of you!’

‘I am glad to hear it: my recollections of you are the less distasteful! – Good morning, my lord!’

She turned away, hobbled, clacking, a few paces, and stood again.

‘You are just as heartless as – as – any other woman, madam! – Where in this hell of a place shall I find my valet? – What was the cursed name I used to call the fool?’

He turned his bare noddle this way and that on its creaking pivot, still holding his knee with both hands.

‘I will be your valet for once, my lord,’ said the lady, turning once more to him. ‘– What can I do for you? It is not easy to tell!’

‘Tie my leg on, of course, you fool! Can’t you see it is all but off? Heigho, my dancing days!’

She looked about with her eyeless sockets and found a piece of fibrous grass, with which she proceeded to bind together the adjoining parts that had formed the knee. When she had done, he gave one or two carefully tentative stamps.

‘You used to stamp rather differently, my lord!’ she said, as she rose from her knees.

‘Eh? what! – Now I look at you again, it seems to me I used to hate you! – Eh?’

‘Naturally, my lord! You hated a good many people! – your wife, of course, among the rest!’

‘Ah, I begin, I be-gin – But – I must have been a long time somewhere! – I really forget! – There! your damned, miserable bit of grass is breaking! – We used to get on *pretty* well together – eh?’

‘Not that I remember, my lord. The only happy moments I had in your company were scattered over the first week of our marriage.’

‘Was that the way of it? Ha! ha! – Well, it’s over now, thank goodness!’

‘I wish I could believe it! Why were we sitting there in that carriage together? It wakes apprehension!’

‘I think we were divorced, my lady!’

‘Hardly enough: we are still together!’

‘A sad truth, but capable of remedy: the forest seems of some extent!’

‘I doubt! I doubt!’

‘I am sorry I cannot think of a compliment to pay you – without lying, that is. To judge by your figure and complexion you have lived hard since I saw you last! I cannot surely be *quite* so naked as your ladyship! – I beg your pardon, madam! I trust you will take it I am but jesting in a dream! It is of no consequence, however; dreaming or waking, all’s one – all merest

appearance! You can't be certain of anything, and that's as good as knowing there is nothing! Life may teach any fool that!'

'It has taught me the fool I was to love you!'

'You were not the only fool to do that! Women had a trick of falling in love with me: – I had forgotten that you were one of them!'

'I did love you, my lord – a little – at one time!'

'Ah, there was your mistake, my lady! You should have loved me much, loved me devotedly, loved me savagely – loved me eternally! Then I should have tired of you the sooner, and not hated you so much afterward! – But let bygones be bygones! – *Where* are we? Locality is the question! To be or not to be, is *not* the question!'

'We are in the other world, I presume!'

'Granted! – but in which or what sort of other world? This can't be hell!'

'It must: there's marriage in it! You and I are damned in each other.'

'Then I'm not like Othello, damned in a fair wife! – Oh, I remember my Shakespeare, madam!'

She picked up a broken branch that had fallen into a bush, and steadying herself with it, walked away, tossing her little skull.

'Give the stick to me,' cried her late husband; 'I want it more than you.'

She returned him no answer.

'You mean to make me beg for it?'

'Not at all, my lord. I mean to keep it,' she replied, continuing her slow departure.

'Give it to me at once; I mean to have it! I require it.'

'Unfortunately, I think I require it myself!' returned the lady, walking a little quicker, with a sharper cracking of her joints and clinking of her bones.

He started to follow her, but nearly fell: his knee-grass had burst, and with an oath he stopped, grasping his leg again.

'Come and tie it up properly!' he would have thundered, but he only piped and whistled!

She turned and looked at him.

'Come and tie it up instantly!' he repeated.

She walked a step or two farther from him.

'I swear I will not touch you!' he cried.

‘Swear on, my lord! there is no one here to believe you. But, pray, do not lose your temper, or you will shake yourself to pieces, and where to find string enough to tie up all your crazy joints, is more than I can tell.’

She came back, and knelt once more at his side – first, however, laying the stick in dispute beyond his reach and within her own.

The instant she had finished retying the joint, he made a grab at her, thinking, apparently, to seize her by the hair; but his hard fingers slipped on the smooth poll.

‘Disgusting!’ he muttered, and laid hold of her upper armbone.

‘You will break it!’ she said, looking up from her knees.

‘I will, then!’ he answered, and began to strain at it.

‘I shall not tie your leg again the next time it comes loose!’ she threathened.

He gave her arm a vicious twist, but happily her bones were in better condition than his. She stretched her other hand toward the broken branch.

‘That’s right: reach me the stick!’ he grinned.

She brought it round with such a swing that one of the bones of the sounder leg snapped. He fell, choking with curses. The lady laughed.

‘Now you will have to wear splints always!’ she said; ‘such dry bones never mend!’

‘You devil!’ he cried.

‘At your service, my lord! Shall I fetch you a couple of wheel-spokes? Neat – but heavy, I fear!’

He turned his bone-face aside, and did not answer, but lay and groaned. I marvelled he had not gone to pieces when he fell. The lady rose and walked away – not all ungracefully, I thought.

‘What can come of it?’ I said to myself. ‘These are too wretched for any world, and this cannot be hell, for the Little Ones are in it, and the sleepers too! What can it all mean? Can things ever come right for skeletons?’

‘There are words too big for you and me: *all* is one of them, and *ever* is another,’ said a voice near me which I knew.

I looked about, but could not see the speaker.

‘You are not in hell,’ it resumed. ‘Neither am I in hell. But those skeletons are in hell!’

Ere he ended I caught sight of the raven on the bough of a beech, right over my head. The same moment he left it, and alighting on the ground,

stood there, the thin old man of the library, with long nose and long coat.

'The male was never a gentleman,' he went on, 'and in the bony stage of retrogression, with his skeleton through his skin, and his character outside his manners, does not look like one. The female is less vulgar, and has a little heart. But, the restraints of society removed, you see them now just as they are and always were!'

'Tell me, Mr Raven, what will become of them,' I said.

'We shall see,' he replied. 'In their day they were the handsomest couple at court; and now, even in their dry bones, they seem to regard their former repute as an inalienable possession; to see their faces, however, may yet do something for them! They felt themselves rich too while they had pockets, but they have already begun to feel rather pinched! My lord used to regard my lady as a worthless encumbrance, for he was tired of her beauty and had spent her money; now he needs her to cobble his joints for him! These changes have roots of hope in them. Besides, they cannot now get far away from each other, and they see none else of their own kind: they must at last grow weary of their mutual repugnance, and begin to love one another! for love, not hate, is deepest in what Love "loved into being."'

'I saw many more of their kind an hour ago, in the hall close by!' I said.

'Of their kind, but not of their sort,' he answered. 'For many years these will see none such as you saw last night. Those are centuries in advance of these. You saw that those could even dress themselves a little! It is true they cannot yet retain their clothes so long as they would – only, at present, for a part of the night; but they are pretty steadily growing more capable, and will by and by develop faces; for every grain of truthfulness adds a fibre to the show of their humanity. Nothing but truth can appear; and whatever is must seem.'

'Are they upheld by this hope?' I asked.

'They are upheld by hope, but they do not in the least know their hope; to understand it, is yet immeasurably beyond them,' answered Mr Raven.

His unexpected appearance had caused me no astonishment. I was like a child, constantly wondering, and surprised at nothing.

'Did you come to find me, sir?' I asked.

'Not at all,' he replied. 'I have no anxiety about you. Such as you always come back to us.'

'Tell me, please, who am I such as?' I said.

‘I cannot make my friend the subject of conversation,’ he answered, with a smile.

‘But when that friend is present!’ I urged.

‘I decline the more strongly,’ he rejoined.

‘But when that friend asks you!’ I persisted.

‘Then most positively I refuse,’ he returned.

‘Why?’

‘Because he and I would be talking of two persons as if they were one and the same. Your consciousness of yourself and my knowledge of you are far apart!’

The lapels of his coat flew out, and the lappets lifted, and I thought the metamorphosis of *homo* to *corvus* was about to take place before my eyes. But the coat closed again in front of him, and he added, with seeming inconsequence,

‘In this world never trust a person who has once deceived you. Above all, never do anything such a one may ask you to do.’

‘I will try to remember,’ I answered; ‘—but I may forget!’

‘Then some evil that is good for you will follow.’

‘And if I remember?’

‘Some evil that is not good for you, will not follow.’

The old man seemed to sink to the ground, and immediately I saw the raven several yards from me, flying low and fast.

CHAPTER 18

Dead or Alive?

I went walking on, still facing the moon, who, not yet high, was staring straight into the forest. I did not know what ailed her, but she was dark and dented, like a battered disc of old copper, and looked dispirited and weary. Not a cloud was nigh to keep her company, and the stars were too bright for her. ‘Is this going to last for ever?’ she seemed to say. She was going one way and I was going the other, yet through the wood we went a long way together. We did not commune much, for my eyes were on the ground; but her disconsolate look was fixed on me: I felt without seeing it. A long time we were together, I and the moon, walking side by side, she the dull shine, and I the live shadow.

Something on the ground, under a spreading tree, caught my eye with its whiteness, and I turned toward it. Vague as it was in the shadow of the foliage, it suggested, as I drew nearer, a human body. ‘Another skeleton!’ I said to myself, kneeling and laying my hand upon it. A body it was, however, and no skeleton, though as nearly one as body could well be. It lay on its side, and was very cold – not cold like a stone, but cold like that which was once alive, and is alive no more. The closer I looked at it, the oftener I touched it, the less it seemed possible it should be other than dead. For one bewildered moment, I fancied it one of the wild dancers, a ghostly Cinderella, perhaps, that had lost her way home, and perished in the strange night of an out-of-door world! It was quite naked, and so worn that, even in the shadow, I could, peering close, have counted, without touching them, every rib in its side. All its bones, indeed, were as visible as if tight-covered

with only a thin elastic leather. Its beautiful yet terrible teeth, unseemly disclosed by the retracted lips, gleamed ghastly through the dark. Its hair was longer than itself, thick and very fine to the touch, and black as night.

It was the body of a tall, probably graceful woman. – How had she come there? Not of herself, and already in such wasted condition, surely! Her strength must have failed her; she had fallen, and lain there until she died of hunger! But how, even so, could she be thus emaciated? And how came she to be naked? Where were the savages to strip and leave her? or what wild beasts would have taken her garments? That her body should have been left was not wonderful!

I rose to my feet, stood, and considered. I must not, could not let her lie exposed and forsaken! Natural reverence forbade it. Even the garment of a woman claims respect; her body it were impossible to leave uncovered! Irreverent eyes might look on it! Brutal claws might toss it about! Years would pass ere the friendly rains washed it into the soil! – But the ground was hard, almost solid with interlacing roots, and I had but my bare hands!

At first it seemed plain that she had not long been dead, there was not a sign of decay about her! But then what had the slow wasting of life left of her to decay?

Could she be still alive? Might she not? What if she were! Things went very strangely in this strange world! Even then there would be little chance of bringing her back, but I must know she was dead before I buried her!

As I left the forest-hall, I had spied in the doorway a bunch of ripe grapes, and brought it with me, eating as I came: a few were yet left on the stalk, and their juice might possibly revive her! Anyhow it was all I had with which to attempt her rescue! The mouth was happily a little open; but the head was in such an awkward position that, to move the body, I passed my arm under the shoulder on which it lay, when I found the pine-needles beneath it warm: she could not have been any time dead, and *might* still be alive, though I could discern no motion of the heart, or any indication that she breathed! One of her hands was clenched hard, apparently inclosing something small. I squeezed a grape into her mouth, but no swallowing followed.

To do for her all I could, I spread a thick layer of pine-needles and dry leaves, laid one of my garments over it, warm from my body, lifted her upon it, and covered her with my clothes and a great heap of leaves: I

would save the little warmth left in her, hoping an increase to it when the sun came back. Then I tried another grape, but could perceive no slightest movement of mouth or throat.

'Doubt,' I said to myself, 'may be a poor encouragement to do anything, but it is a bad reason for doing nothing.' So tight was the skin upon her bones that I dared not use friction.

I crept into the heap of leaves, got as close to her as I could, and took her in my arms. I had not much heat left in me, but what I had I would share with her! Thus I spent what remained of the night, sleepless, and longing for the sun. Her cold seemed to radiate into me, but no heat to pass from me to her.

Had I fled from the beautiful sleepers, I thought, each on her 'dim, straight' silver couch, to lie alone with such a bedfellow! I had refused a lovely privilege: I was given over to an awful duty! Beneath the sad, slow-setting moon, I lay with the dead, and watched for the dawn.

The darkness had given way, and the eastern horizon was growing dimly clearer, when I caught sight of a motion rather than of anything that moved – not far from me, and close to the ground. It was the low undulating of a large snake, which passed me in an unswerving line. Presently appeared, making as it seemed for the same point, what I took for a roebuck-doe and her calf. Again a while, and two creatures like bear-cubs came, with three or four smaller ones behind them. The light was now growing so rapidly that when, a few minutes after, a troop of horses went trotting past, I could see that, although the largest of them were no bigger than the smallest Shetland pony, they must yet be full-grown, so perfect were they in form, and so much had they all the ways and action of great horses. They were of many breeds. Some seemed models of cart-horses, others of chargers, hunters, racers. Dwarf cattle and small elephants followed.

'Why are the children not here!' I said to myself. 'The moment I am free of this poor woman, I must go back and fetch them!'

Where were the creatures going? What drew them? Was this an exodus, or a morning habit? I must wait for the sun! Till he came I must not leave the woman!

I laid my hand on the body, and could not help thinking it felt a trifle warmer. It might have gained a little of the heat I had lost! it could hardly have generated any! What reason for hope there was had not grown less!

The forehead of the day began to glow, and soon the sun came peering up, as if to see for the first time what all this stir of a new world was about. At sight of his great innocent splendour, I rose full of life, strong against death. Removing the handkerchief I had put to protect the mouth and eyes from the pine-needles, I looked anxiously to see whether I had found a priceless jewel, or but its empty case.

The body lay motionless as when I found it. Then first, in the morning light, I saw how drawn and hollow was the face, how sharp were the bones under the skin, how every tooth shaped itself through the lips. The human garment was indeed worn to its threads, but the bird of heaven might yet be nestling within, might yet awake to motion and song!

But the sun was shining on her face! I re-arranged the handkerchief, laid a few leaves lightly over it, and set out to follow the creatures. Their main track we well beaten, and must have long been used – likewise many of the tracks that, joining it from both sides, merged in, and broadened it. The trees retreated as I went, and the grass grew thicker. Presently the forest was gone, and a wide expanse of loveliest green stretched away to the horizon. Through it, along the edge of the forest, flowed a small river, and to this the track led. At sight of the water a new though undefined hope sprang up in me. The stream looked everywhere deep, and was full to the brim, but nowhere more than a few yards wide. A bluish mist rose from it, vanishing as it rose. On the opposite side, in the plentiful grass, many small animals were feeding. Apparently they slept in the forest, and in the morning sought the plain, swimming the river to reach it. I knelt and would have drunk, but the water was hot, and had a strange metallic taste.

I leapt to my feet: here was the warmth I sought – the first necessity of life! I sped back to my helpless charge.

Without well considering my solitude, no one will understand what seemed to lie for me in the redemption of this woman from death. ‘Prove what she may,’ I thought with myself. ‘I shall at least be lonely no more!’ I had found myself such poor company that now first I seemed to know what hope was. This blessed water would expel the cold death, and drown my desolation!

I bore her to the stream. Tall as she was, I found her marvellously light, her bones were so delicate, and so little covered them. I grew yet more hopeful when I found her so far from stiff that I could carry her on one arm,

like a sleeping child, leaning against my shoulder. I went softly, dreading even the wind of my motion, and glad there was no other.

The water was too hot to lay her at once in it: the shock might scare from her the yet fluttering life! I laid her on the bank, and dipping one of my garments, began to bathe the pitiful form. So wasted was it that, save for the plentifulness and blackness of the hair, it was impossible even to conjecture whether she was young or old. Her eyelids were just not shut, which made her look dead the more: there was a crack in the clouds of her night, at which no sun shone through!

The longer I went on bathing the poor bones, the less grew my hope that they would ever again be clothed with strength, that ever those eyelids would lift, and a soul look out; still I kept bathing continuously, allowing no part time to grow cold while I bathed another; and gradually the body became so much warmer, that at last I ventured to submerge it: I got into the stream and drew it in, holding the face above the water, and letting the swift, steady current flow all about the rest. I noted, but was able to conclude nothing from the fact, that, for all the heat, the shut hand never relaxed its hold.

After about ten minutes, I lifted it out and laid it again on the bank, dried it, and covered it as well as I could, then ran to the forest for leaves.

The grass and soil were dry and warm; and when I returned I thought it had scarcely lost any of the heat the water had given it. I spread the leaves upon it, and ran for more – then for a third and a fourth freight.

I could now leave it and go to explore, in the hope of discovering some shelter. I ran up the stream toward some rocky hills I saw in that direction, which were not far off.

When I reached them, I found the river issuing full grown from a rock at the bottom of one of them. To my fancy it seemed to have run down a stair inside, an eager cataract, at every landing wild to get out, but only at the foot finding a door of escape.

It did not fill the opening whence it rushed, and I crept through into a little cave, where I learned that, instead of hurrying tumultuously down a stair, it rose quietly from the ground at the back, like the base of a large column, and ran along one side, nearly filling a deep, rather narrow channel. I considered the place, and saw that, if I could find a few fallen boughs long enough to lie across the channel, and large enough to bear a

little weight without bending much, I might, with smaller branches and plenty of leaves, make upon them a comfortable couch, which the stream under would keep constantly warm. Then I ran back to see how my charge fared.

She was lying as I had left her. The heat had not brought her to life, but neither had it developed anything to check further hope. I got a few boulders out of the channel, and arranged them at her feet and on both sides of her.

Running again to the wood, I had not to search long ere I found some small boughs fit for my purpose – mostly of beech, their dry yellow leaves yet clinging to them. With these I had soon laid the floor of a bridge-bed over the torrent. I crossed the boughs with smaller branches, interlaced these with twigs, and buried all deep in leaves and dry moss.

When thus at length, after not a few journeys to the forest, I had completed a warm, dry, soft couch, I took the body once more, and set out with it for the cave. It was so light that now and then as I went I almost feared lest, when I laid it down, I should find it a skeleton after all; and when at last I did lay it gently on the pathless bridge, it was a greater relief to part with that fancy than with the weight. Once more I covered the body with a thick layer of leaves; and trying again to feed her with a grape, found to my joy that I could open the mouth a little farther. The grape, indeed, lay in it unheeded, but I hoped some of the juice might find its way down.

After an hour or two on the couch, she was no longer cold. The warmth of the brook had interpenetrated her frame – truly it was but a frame! – and she was warm to the touch; – not, probably, with the warmth of life, but with a warmth which rendered it more possible, if she were alive, that she might live. I had read of one in a trance lying motionless for weeks!

In that cave, day after day, night after night, seven long days and nights, I sat or lay, now waking now sleeping, but always watching. Every morning I went out and bathed in the hot stream, and every morning felt thereupon as if I had eaten and drunk – which experience gave me courage to lay her in it also every day. Once as I did so, a shadow of discoloration on her left side gave me a terrible shock, but the next morning it had vanished, and I continued the treatment – every morning, after her bath, putting a fresh grape in her mouth.

I too ate of the grapes and other berries I found in the forest; but I believed that, with my daily bath in that river, I could have done very well without eating at all.

Every time I slept, I dreamed of finding a wounded angel, who, unable to fly, remained with me until at last she loved me and would not leave me; and every time I woke, it was to see, instead of an angel-visage with lustrous eyes, the white, motionless, wasted face upon the couch. But Adam himself, when first he saw her asleep, could not have looked more anxiously for Eve's awaking than I watched for this woman's. Adam knew nothing of himself, perhaps nothing of his need of another self; I, an alien from my fellows, had learned to love what I had lost! Were this one wasted shred of womanhood to disappear, I should have nothing in me but a consuming hunger after life! I forgot even the Little Ones: things were not amiss with them! here lay what might wake and be a woman! might actually open eyes, and look out of them upon me!

Now first I knew what solitude meant – now that I gazed on one who neither saw nor heard, neither moved nor spoke. I saw now that a man alone is but a being that may become a man – that he is but a need, and therefore a possibility. To be enough for himself, a being must be an eternal, self-existent worm! So superbly constituted, so simply complicate is man; he rises from and stands upon such a pedestal of lower physical organisms and spiritual structures, that no atmosphere will comfort or nourish his life, less divine than that offered by other souls; nowhere but in other lives can he ripen his specialty, develop the idea of himself, the individuality that distinguishes him from every other. Were all men alike, each would still have an individuality, secured by his personal consciousness, but there would be small reason why there should be more than two or three such; while, for the development of the differences which make a large and lofty unity possible, and which alone can make millions into a church, an endless and measureless influence and reaction are indispensable. A man to be perfect – complete, that is, in having reached the spiritual condition of persistent and universal growth, which is the mode wherein he inherits the infinitude of his Father – must have the education of a world of fellow-men. Save for the hope of the dawn of life in the form beside me, I should have fled for fellowship to the beasts that grazed and did not speak. Better to go about with them – infinitely better – than to live alone! But with the faintest

prospect of a woman to my friend, I poorest of creatures, was yet a possible man!

CHAPTER 19

The White Leech

I woke one morning from a profound sleep, with one of my hands very painful. The back of it was much swollen, and in the centre of the swelling was a triangular wound, like the bite of a leech. As the day went on, the swelling subsided, and by the evening the hurt was all but healed. I searched the cave, turning over every stone of any size, but discovered nothing I could imagine capable of injuring me.

Slowly the days passed, and still the body never moved, never opened its eyes. It could not be dead, for assuredly it manifested no sign of decay, and the air about it was quite pure. Moreover, I could imagine that the sharpest angles of the bones had begun to disappear, that the form was everywhere a little rounder, and the skin had less of a parchment-look: if such change was indeed there, life must be there! the tide which had ebbed so far toward the infinite, must have begun again to flow! Oh joy to me, if the rising ripples of life's ocean were indeed burying under lovely shape the bones it had all but forsaken! Twenty times a day I looked for evidence of progress, and twenty times a day I doubted – sometimes even despaired; but the moment I recalled the mental picture of her as I found her, hope revived.

Several weeks had passed thus, when one night, after lying a long time awake, I rose, thinking to go out and breathe the cooler air; for, although from the running of the stream it was always fresh in the cave, the heat was not seldom a little oppressive. The moon outside was full, the air within shadowy clear, and naturally I cast a lingering look on my treasure ere I went. 'Bliss eternal!' I cried aloud, 'do I see her eyes?' Great orbs, dark as if

cut from the sphere of a starless night, and luminous by excess of darkness, seemed to shine amid the glimmering whiteness of her face. I stole nearer, my heart beating so that I feared the noise of it startling her. I bent over her. Alas, her eyelids were close shut! Hope and Imagination had wrought mutual illusion! my heart's desire would never be! I turned away, threw myself on the floor of the cave, and wept. Then I bethought me that her eyes had been a little open, and that now the awful chink out of which nothingness had peered, was gone: it might be that she had opened them for a moment, and was again asleep! – it might be she was awake and holding them close! In either case, life, less or more, must have shut them! I was comforted, and fell fast asleep.

That night I was again bitten, and awoke with a burning thirst.

In the morning I searched yet more thoroughly, but again in vain. The wound was of the same character, and, as before, was nearly well by the evening. I concluded that some large creature of the leech kind came occasionally from the hot stream. 'But, if blood be its object,' I said to myself, 'so long as I am there, I need hardly fear for my treasure!'

That same morning, when, having peeled a grape as usual and taken away the seeds, I put it in her mouth, her lips made a slight movement of reception, and I *knew* she lived!

My hope was now so much stronger that I began to think of some attire for her: she must be able to rise the moment she wished! I betook myself therefore to the forest, to investigate what material it might afford, and had hardly begun to look when fibrous skeletons, like those of the leaves of the prickly pear, suggested themselves as fit for the purpose. I gathered a stock of them, laid them to dry in the sun, pulled apart the reticulated layers, and of these had soon begun to fashion two loose garments, one to hang from her waist, the other from her shoulders. With the stiletto-point of an aloe-leaf and various filaments, I sewed together three thicknesses of the tissue.

During the week that followed, there was no further sign except that she more evidently took the grapes. But indeed all the signs became surer: plainly she was growing plumper, and her skin fairer. Still she did not open her eyes; and the horrid fear would at times invade me, that her growth was of some hideous fungoid nature, the few grapes being nowise sufficient to account for it.

Again I was bitten; and now the thing, whatever it was, began to pay me regular visits at intervals of three days. It now generally bit me in the neck or the arm, invariably with but one bite, always while I slept, and never, even when I slept, in the daytime. Hour after hour would I lie awake on the watch, but never heard it coming, or saw sign of its approach. Neither, I believe, did I ever feel it bite me. At length I became so hopeless of catching it, that I no longer troubled myself either to look for it by day, or lie in wait for it at night. I knew from my growing weakness that I was losing blood at a dangerous rate, but I cared little for that: in sight of my eyes death was yielding to life; a soul was gathering strength to save me from loneliness; we would go away together, and I should speedily recover!

The garments were at length finished, and, contemplating my handiwork with no small satisfaction, I proceded to mat layers of the fibre into sandals.

One night I woke suddenly, breathless and faint, and longing after air, and had risen to crawl from the cave, when a slight rustle in the leaves of the couch set me listening motionless.

'I caught the vile thing,' said a feeble voice, in my mother-tongue; 'I caught it in the very act!'

She was alive! she spoke! I dared not yield to my transport lest I should terrify her.

'What creature?' I breathed, rather than said.

'The creature,' she answered, 'that was biting you.'

'What was it?'

'A great white leech.'

'How big?' I pursued, forcing myself to be calm.

'Not far from six feet long, I should think,' she answered.

'You have saved my life, perhaps! – But how could you touch the horrid thing! How brave of you!' I cried.

'I did!' was all her answer, and I thought she shuddered.

'Where is it? What could you do with such a monster?'

'I threw it in the river.'

'Then it will come again, I fear!'

'I do not think I could have killed it, even had I known how! – I heard you moaning, and got up to see what disturbed you; saw the frightful thing at your neck, and pulled it away. But I could not hold it, and was hardly able to throw it from me. I only heard it splash in the water!'

‘We’ll kill it next time!’ I said, but with that I turned faint, sought the open air, but fell.

When I came to myself the sun was up. The lady stood a little way off, looking, even in the clumsy attire I had fashioned for her, at once grand and graceful. I *had* seen those glorious eyes! Through the night they had shone! Dark as the darkness primeval, they now outshone the day! She stood erect as a column, regarding me. Her pale cheek indicated no emotion, only question. I rose.

‘We must be going!’ I said. ‘The white leech—’

I stopped: a strange smile had flickered over her beautiful face.

‘Did you find me there?’ she asked, pointing to the cave.

‘No; I brought you there,’ I replied.

‘You brought me?’

‘Yes.’

‘From where?’

‘From the forest.’

‘What have you done with my clothes – and my jewels?’

‘You had none when I found you.’

‘Then why did you not leave me?’

‘Because I hoped you were not dead.’

‘Why should you have cared?’

‘Because I was very lonely, and wanted you to live.’

‘You would have kept me enchanted for my beauty!’ she said, with proud scorn.

Her words and her look roused my indignation.

‘There was no beauty left in you,’ I said.

‘Why, then, again, did you not let me alone?’

‘Because you were of my own kind.’

‘Of *your* kind?’ she cried, in a tone of utter contempt.

‘I thought so, but find I was mistaken!’

‘Doubtless you pitied me!’

‘Never had woman more claim on pity, or less on any other feeling!’

With an expression of pain, mortification, and anger unutterable, she turned from me and stood silent. Starless night lay profound in the gulfs of her eyes: hate of him who brought it back had slain their splendour. The light of life was gone from them.

‘Had you failed to rouse me, what would you have done?’ she asked suddenly without moving.

‘I would have buried it.’

‘It! What? – You would have buried *this?’* she exclaimed, flashing round upon me in a white fury, her arms thrown out, and her eyes darting forks of cold lightning.

‘Nay; – that I saw not! That, weary weeks of watching and tending have brought back to you,’ I answered – for with such a woman I must be plain! ‘Had I seen the smallest sign of decay, I would at once have buried you.’

‘Dog of a fool!’ she cried, ‘I was but in a trance! – Samoil! what a fate! – Go and fetch the she-savage from whom you borrowed this hideous disguise.’

‘I made it for you. It is hideous, but I did my best.’

She drew herself up to her tall height.

‘How long have I been insensible?’ she demanded. ‘A woman could not have made that dress in a day!’

‘Not in twenty days,’ I rejoined, ‘hardly in thirty!’

‘Ha! How long do you pretend I have lain unconscious? – Answer me at once.’

‘I cannot tell how long you had lain when I found you, but there was nothing left of you save skin and bone: that is more than three months ago. – Your hair was beautiful, nothing else! I have done for it what I could.’

‘My poor hair!’ she said, and brought a great armful of it round from behind her; ‘—it will be more than a three-months’ care to bring *you* to life again! – I suppose I must thank you, although I cannot say I am grateful!’

‘There is no need, madam: I would have done the same for any woman – yes, or for any man either!’

‘How is it my hair is not tangled?’ she said, fondling it.

‘It always drifted in the current.’

‘How? – What do you mean?’

‘I could not have brought you to life but by bathing you in the hot river every morning.’

She gave a shudder of disgust, and stood for a while with her gaze fixed on the hurrying water. Then she turned to me:

‘We must understand each other!’ she said. ‘—You have done me the two worst of wrongs – compelled me to live, and put me to shame: neither of

them can I pardon!’

She raised her left hand, and flung it out as if repelling me. Something ice-cold struck me on the forehead. When I came to myself, I was on the ground, wet and shivering.

CHAPTER 20

Gone! – but How?

I rose and looked around me, dazed at heart. For a moment I could not see her: she was gone, and loneliness had returned like the cloud after the rain! She whom I brought back from the brink of the grave, had fled from me, and left me with desolation! I dared not one moment remain thus hideously alone. Had I indeed done her a wrong? I must devote my life to sharing the burden I had compelled her to resume!

I descried her walking swiftly over the grass, away from the river, took one plunge for a farewell restorative, and set out to follow her. The last visit of the white leech, and the blow of the woman, had enfeebled me, but already my strength was reviving, and I kept her in sight without difficulty.

'Is this, then, the end?' I said as I went, and my heart brooded a sad song. Her angry, hating eyes haunted me. I could understand her resentment at my having forced life upon her, but how had I further injured her? Why should she loathe me? Could modesty itself be indignant with true service? How should the proudest woman, conscious of my every action, cherish against me the last sense of disgracing wrong? How reverently had I not touched her! As a father his motherless child, I had borne and tended her! Had all my labour, all my despairing hope gone to redeem only ingratitude? 'No,' I answered myself; 'beauty must have a heart! However profoundly hidden, it must be there! The deeper buried, the stronger and truer will it wake at last in its beautiful grave! To rouse that heart were a better gift to her than the happiest life! It would be to give her a nobler, a higher life!'

She was ascending a gentle slope before me, walking straight and steady as one that knew whither, when I became aware that she was increasing the distance between us. I summoned my strength, and it came in full tide. My veins filled with fresh life! My body seemed to become ethereal, and, following like an easy wind, I rapidly overtook her.

Not once had she looked behind. Swiftly she moved, like a Greek goddess to rescue, but without haste. I was within three yards of her, when she turned sharply, yet with grace unbroken, and stood. Fatigue or heat she showed none. Her paleness was not a pallor, but a pure whiteness; her breathing was slow and deep. Her eyes seemed to fill the heavens, and give light to the world. It was nearly noon, but the sense was upon me as of a great night in which an invisible dew makes the stars look large.

'Why do you follow me?' she asked, quietly but rather sternly, as if she had never before seen me.

'I have lived so long,' I answered, 'on the mere hope of your eyes, that I must want to see them again!'

'You *will* not be spared!' she said coldly. 'I command you to stop where you stand.'

'Not until I see you in a place of safety will I leave you,' I replied.

'Then take the consequences,' she said, and resumed her swift-gliding walk.

But as she turned she cast on me a glance, and I stood as if run through with a spear. Her scorn had failed: she would kill me with her beauty!

Despair restored my volition; the spell broke; I ran, and overtook her.

'Have pity upon me!' I cried.

She gave no heed. I followed her like a child whose mother pretends to abandon him. 'I will be your slave!' I said, and laid my hand on her arm.

She turned as if a serpent had bit her. I cowered before the blaze of her eyes, but could not avert my own.

'Pity me,' I cried again.

She resumed her walking.

The whole day I followed her. The sun climbed the sky, seemed to pause on its summit, went down the other side. Not a moment did she pause, not a moment did I cease to follow. She never turned her head, never relaxed her pace.

The sun went below, and the night came up. I kept close to her: if I lost sight of her for a moment, it would be for ever!

All day long we had been walking over thick soft grass, abruptly she stopped, and threw herself upon it. There was yet light enough to show that she was utterly weary. I stood behind her, and gazed down on her for a moment.

Did I love her? I knew she was not good! Did I hate her? I could not leave her! I knelt beside her.

'Begone! Do not dare touch me,' she cried.

Her arms lay on the grass by her sides as if paralysed.

Suddenly they closed about my neck, rigid as those of the torture-maiden. She drew down my face to hers, and her lips clung to my cheek. A sting of pain shot somewhere through me, and pulsed. I could not stir a hair's breadth. Gradually the pain ceased. A slumberous weariness, a dreamy pleasure stole over me, and then I knew nothing.

All at once I came to myself. The moon was a little way above the horizon, but spread no radiance; she was but a bright thing set in blackness. My cheek smarted; I put my hand to it, and found a wet spot. My neck ached: there again was a wet spot! I sighed heavily, and felt very tired. I turned my eyes listlessly around me – and saw what had become of the light of the moon: it was gathered about the lady! she stood in a shimmering nimbus! I rose and staggered toward her.

'Down!' she cried imperiously, as to a rebellious dog. 'Follow me a step if you dare!'

'I will!' I murmured, with an agonised effort.

'Set foot within the gates of my city, and my people will stone you: they do not love beggars!'

I was deaf to her words. Weak as water, and half awake, I did not know that I moved, but the distance grew less between us. She took one step back, raised her left arm, and with the clenched hand seemed to strike me on the forehead. I received as it were a blow from an iron hammer, and fell.

I sprang to my feet, cold and wet, but clear-headed and strong. Had the blow revived me? it had left neither wound nor pain! – But how came I wet? – I could not have lain long, for the moon was no higher!

The lady stood some yards away, her back toward me. She was doing something, I could not distinguish what. Then by her sudden gleam I knew

she had thrown off her garments, and stood white in the dazed moon. One moment she stood – and fell forward.

A streak of white shot away in a swift-drawn line. The same instant the moon recovered herself, shining out with a full flash, and I saw that the streak was a long-bodied thing, rushing in great, low-curved bounds over the grass. Dark spots seemed to run like a stream adown its back, as if it had been fleeting along under the edge of a wood, and catching the shadows of the leaves.

'God of mercy!' I cried, 'is the terrible creature speeding to the night-infolded city?' and I seemed to hear from afar the sudden burst and spread of outcrying terror, as the pale savage bounded from house to house, rending and slaying.

While I gazed after it fear-stricken, past me from behind, like a swift, all but noiseless arrow, shot a second large creature, pure white. Its path was straight for the spot where the lady had fallen, and, as I thought, lay. My tongue clave to the roof of my mouth. I sprang forward pursuing the beast. But in a moment the spot I made for was far behind it.

'It was well,' I thought, 'that I could not cry out: if she had risen, the monster would have been upon her!'

But when I reached the place, no lady was there; only the garments she had dropped lay dusk in the moonlight.

I stood staring after the second beast. It tore over the ground with yet greater swiftness than the former – in long, level, skimming leaps, the very embodiment of wasteless speed. It followed the line the other had taken, and I watched it grow smaller and smaller, until it disappeared in the uncertain distance.

But where was the lady? Had the first beast surprised her, creeping upon her noiselessly? I had heard no shriek! and there had not been time to devour her! Could it have caught her up as it ran, and borne her away to its den? So laden it could not have run so fast! and I should have seen that it carried something!

Horrible doubts began to wake in me. After a thorough but fruitless search, I set out in the track of the two animals.

CHAPTER 21

The Fugitive Mother

As I hastened along, a cloud came over the moon, and from the gray dark suddenly emerged a white figure, clasping a child to her bosom, and stooping as she ran. She was on a line parallel with my own, but did not perceive me as she hurried along, terror and anxiety in every movement of her driven speed.

'She is chased!' I said to myself. 'Some prowler of this terrible night is after her!'

To follow would have added to her fright: I stepped into her track to stop her pursuer.

As I stood for a moment looking after her through the dusk, behind me came a swift, soft-footed rush, and ere I could turn, something sprang over my head, struck me sharply on the forehead, and knocked me down. I was up in an instant, but all I saw of my assailant was a vanishing whiteness. I ran after the beast, with the blood trickling from my forehead; but had run only a few steps, when a shriek of despair tore the quivering night. I ran the faster, though I could not but fear it must already be too late.

In a minute or two I spied a low white shape approaching me through the vapour-dusted moonlight. It must be another beast, I thought at first, for it came slowly, almost crawling, with strange, floundering leaps, as of a creature in agony! I drew aside from its path, and waited. As it neared me, I saw it was going on three legs, carrying its left fore-paw high from the ground. It had many dark, oval spots on a shining white skin, and was

attended by a low rushing sound, as of water falling upon grass. As it went by me, I saw something streaming from the lifted paw.

‘It is blood!’ I said to myself, ‘some readier champion than I has wounded the beast!’ But, strange to tell, such a pity seized me at sight of the suffering creature, that, though an axe had been in my hand I could not have struck at it. In a broken succession of hobbling leaps it went out of sight, its blood, as it seemed, still issuing in a small torrent, which kept flowing back softly through the grass beside me. ‘If it go on bleeding like that,’ I thought, ‘it will soon be hurtless!’

I went on, for I might yet be useful to the woman, and hoped also to see her deliverer.

I descried her a little way off, seated on the grass, with her child in her lap.

‘Can I do anything for you?’ I asked.

At the sound of my voice she started violently, and would have risen. I threw myself on the ground.

‘You need not be frightened,’ I said. ‘I was following the beast when happily you found a nearer protector! It passed me now with its foot bleeding so much that by this time it must be all but dead!’

‘There is little hope of that!’ she answered, trembling. ‘Do you not know whose beast she is?’

Now I had certain strange suspicions, but I answered that I knew nothing of the brute, and asked what had become of her champion.

‘What champion?’ she rejoined. ‘I have seen no one.’

‘Then how came the monster to grief?’

‘I pounded her foot with a stone – as hard as I could strike. Did you not hear her cry?’

‘Well, you are a brave woman!’ I answered. ‘I thought it was you gave the cry!’

‘It was the leopardess.’

‘I never heard such a sound from the throat of an animal! it was like the scream of a woman in torture!’

‘My voice was gone; I could not have shrieked to save my baby! When I saw the horrid mouth at my darling’s little white neck, I caught up a stone and mashed her lame foot.’

‘Tell me about the creature,’ I said; ‘I am a stranger in these parts.’

‘You will soon know about her if you are going to Bulika!’ she answered. ‘Now, I must never go back there!’

‘Yes, I am going to Bulika,’ I said, ‘—to see the princess.’

‘Have a care; you had better not go! – But perhaps you are—! The princess is a very good, kind woman!’

I heard a little movement. Clouds had by this time gathered so thick over the moon that I could scarcely see my companion: I feared she was rising to run from me.

‘You are in no danger of any sort from me,’ I said ‘What oath would you like me to take?’

‘I know by your speech that you are not of the people of Bulika,’ she replied; ‘I will trust you! – I am not of them, either, else I should not be able: they never trust any one – If only I could see you! But I like your voice!— There, my darling is asleep! The foul beast has not hurt her! – Yes: it was my baby she was after!’ she went on, caressing the child. ‘And then she would have torn her mother to pieces for carrying her off!— Some say the princess has two white leopardesses,’ she continued: ‘I know only one – with spots. Everybody knows *her*! If the princess hears of a baby, she sends her immediately to suck its blood, and then it either dies or grows up an idiot. I would have gone away with my baby, but the princess was from home, and I thought I might wait until I was a little stronger But she must have taken the beast with her, and been on her way home when I left, and come across my track. I heard the *sniff-snuff* of the leopardess behind me, and ran; – oh, how I ran! – But my darling will not die! There is no mark on her!’

‘Where are you taking her?’

‘Where no one ever tells!’

‘Why is the princess so cruel?’

‘There is an old prophecy that a child will be the death of her. That is why she will listen to no offer of marriage, they say.’

‘But what will become of her country if she kills all the babies?’

‘She does not care about her country. She sends witches around to teach the women spells that keep babies away, and give them horrible things to eat. Some say she is in league with the Shadows to put an end to the race. At night we hear the questing beast, and lie awake and shiver. She can tell at once the house where a baby is coming, and lies down at the door,

watching to get in. There are words that have power to shoo her away, only they do not always work— But here I sit talking, and the beast may by this time have got home, and her mistress be sending the other after us!'

As thus she ended, she rose in haste.

'I do not think she will ever get home. – Let me carry the baby for you!' I said, as I rose also.

She returned me no answer, and when I would have taken it, only clasped it the closer.

'I cannot think,' I said, walking by her side, 'how the brute could be bleeding so much!'

'Take my advice, and don't go near the palace,' she answered. 'There are sounds in it at night as if the dead were trying to shriek, but could not open their mouths!'

She bade me an abrupt farewell. Plainly she did not want more of my company; so I stood still, and heard her footsteps die away on the grass.

CHAPTER 22

Bulika

I had lost all notion of my position, and was walking about in pure, helpless impatience, when suddenly I found myself in the path of the leopardess, wading in the blood from her paw. It ran against my ankles with the force of a small brook, and I got out of it the more quickly because of an unshaped suspicion in my mind as to whose blood it might be. But I kept close to the sound of it, walking up the side of the stream, for it would guide me in the direction of Bulika.

I soon began to reflect, however, that no leopardess, no elephant, no hugest animal that in our world preceded man, could keep such a torrent flowing, except every artery in its body were open, and its huge system went on filling its vessels from fields and lakes and forests as fast as they emptied themselves: it could not be blood! I dipped a finger in it, and at once satisfied myself that it was not. In truth, however it might have come there, it was a softly murmuring rivulet of water that ran, without channel, over the grass! But sweet as was its song, I dared not drink of it, I kept walking on, hoping after the light, and listening to the familiar sound so long unheard – for that of the hot stream was very different. The mere wetting of my feet in it, however, had so refreshed me, that I went on without fatigue till the darkness began to grow thinner, and I knew the sun was drawing nigh. A few minutes more, and I could discern, against the pale aurora, the wall-towers of a city – seemingly old as time itself. Then I looked down to get a sight of the brook.

It was gone. I had indeed for a long time noted its sound growing fainter, but at last had ceased to attend to it. I looked back: the grass in its course lay bent as it had flowed, and here and there glimmered a small pool. Toward the city, there was no trace of it. Near where I stood, the flow of its fountain must at least have paused!

Around the city were gardens, growing many sorts of vegetables, hardly one of which I recognised. I saw no water, no flowers, no sign of animals. The gardens came very near the walls, but were separated from them by huge heaps of gravel and refuse thrown from the battlements.

I went up to the nearest gate, and found it but half-closed, nowise secured, and without guard or sentinel. To judge by its hinges, it could not be farther opened or shut closer. Passing through, I looked down a long ancient street. It was utterly silent, and with scarce an indication in it of life present. Had I come upon a dead city? I turned and went out again, toiled a long way over the dust-heaps, and crossed several roads, each leading up to a gate: I would not re-enter until some of the inhabitants should be stirring.

What was I there for? what did I expect or hope to find? what did I mean to do?

I must see, if but once more, the woman I had brought to life! I did not desire her society: she had waked in me frightful suspicions; and friendship, not to say love, was wildly impossible between us! But her presence had had a strange influence upon me, and in her presence I must resist, and at the same time analyse that influence! The seemingly inscrutable in her I would fain penetrate: to understand something of her mode of being would be to look into marvels such as imagination could never have suggested! In this I was too daring: a man must not, for knowledge, of his own will encounter temptation! On the other hand, I had reinstated an evil force about to perish, and was, to the extent of my opposing faculty, accountable for what mischief might ensue! I had learned that she was the enemy of children: the Little Ones might be in her danger! It was in the hope of finding out something of their history that I had left them; on that I had received a little light: I must have more; I must learn how to protect them!

Hearing at length a little stir in the place, I walked through the next gate, and thence along a narrow street of tall houses to a little square, where I sat down on the base of a pillar with a hideous bat-like creature atop. Ere long,

several of the inhabitants came sauntering past. I spoke to one: he gave me a rude stare and ruder word, and went on.

I got up and went through one narrow street after another, gradually filling with idlers, and was not surprised to see no children. By and by, near one of the gates, I encountered a group of young men who reminded me not a little of the bad giants. They came about me staring, and presently began to push and hustle me, then to throw things at me. I bore it as well as I could, wishing not to provoke enmity where I wanted to remain for a while. Oftener than once or twice I appealed to passersby whom I fancied more benevolent-looking, but none would halt a moment to listen to me. I looked poor, and that was enough: to the citizens of Bulika, as to house-dogs, poverty was an offence! Deformity and sickness were taxed; and no legislation of their princess was more heartily approved of than what tended to make poverty subserve wealth.

I took to my heels at last, and no one followed me beyond the gate. A lumbering fellow, however, who sat by it eating a hunch of bread, picked up a stone to throw after me, and happily, in his stupid eagerness, threw, not the stone but the bread. I took it, and he did not dare follow to reclaim it: beyond the walls they were cowards every one. I went off a few hundred yards, threw myself down, ate the bread, fell asleep, and slept soundly in the grass, where the hot sunlight renewed my strength.

It was night when I woke. The moon looked down on me in friendly fashion, seeming to claim with me old acquaintance. She was very bright, and the same moon, I thought, that saw me through the terrors of my first night in that strange world. A cold wind blew from the gate, bringing with it an evil odour; but it did not chill me, for the sun had plenished me with warmth. I crept again into the city. There I found the few that were still in the open air crouched in corners to escape the shivering blast.

I was walking slowly through the long narrow street, when, just before me, a huge white thing bounded across it, with a single flash in the moonlight, and disappeared. I turned down the next opening, eager to get sight of it again.

It was a narrow lane, almost too narrow to pass through, but it led me into a wider street. The moment I entered the latter, I saw on the opposite side, in the shadow, the creature I had followed, itself following like a dog what I took for a man. Over his shoulder, every other moment, he glanced at

the animal behind him, but neither spoke to it, nor attempted to drive it away. At a place where he had to cross a patch of moonlight, I saw that he cast no shadow, and was himself but a flat superficial shadow, of two dimensions. He was, nevertheless, an opaque shadow, for he not merely darkened any object on the other side of him, but rendered it, in fact, invisible. In the shadow he was blacker than the shadow; in the moonlight he looked like one who had drawn his shadow up about him, for not a suspicion of it moved beside or under him; while the gleaming animal, which followed so close at his heels as to seem the white shadow of his blackness, and which I now saw to be a leopardess, drew her own gliding shadow black over the ground by her side. When they passed together from the shadow into the moonlight, the Shadow deepened in blackness, the animal flashed into radiance. I was at the moment walking abreast of them on the opposite side, my bare feet sounding on the flat stones: the leopardess never turned head or twitched ear; the shadow seemed once to look at me, for I lost his profile, and saw for a second only a sharp upright line. That instant the wind found me and blew through me: I shuddered from head to foot, and my heart went from wall to wall of my bosom, like a pebble in a child’s rattle.

CHAPTER 23

A Woman of Bulika

I turned aside into an alley, and sought shelter in a small archway. In the mouth of it I stopped, and looked out at the moonlight which filled the alley. The same instant a woman came gliding in after me, turned, trembling, and looked out also. A few seconds passed, then a huge leopard, its white skin dappled with many blots, darted across the archway. The woman pressed close to me, and my heart filled with pity. I put my arm round her.

'If the brute come here, I will lay hold of it,' I said, 'and you must run.'

'Thank you!' she murmured.

'Have you ever seen it before?' I asked.

'Several times,' she answered, still trembling. 'She is a pet of the princess's. You are a stranger, or you would know her!'

'I am a stranger,' I answered. 'But is she, then, allowed to run loose?'

'She is kept in a cage, her mouth muzzled, and her feet in gloves of crocodile leather. Chained she is too; but she gets out often, and sucks the blood of any child she can lay hold of. Happily there are not many mothers in Bulika!'

Here she burst into tears.

'I wish I were at home!' she sobbed. 'The princess returned only last night, and there is the leopardess out already! How am I to get into the house? It is me she is after, I know! She will be lying at my own door, watching for me! – But I am a fool to talk to a stranger!'

‘All strangers are not bad!’ I said. ‘The beast shall not touch you till she has done with me, and by that time you will be in. You are happy to have a house to go to! What a terrible wind it is!’

‘Take me home safe, and I will give you shelter from it,’ she rejoined. ‘But we must wait a little!’

I asked her many questions. She told me the people never did anything except dig for precious stones in their cellars. They were rich, and had everything made for them in other towns.

‘Why?’ I asked.

‘Because it is a disgrace to work,’ she answered. ‘Everybody in Bulika knows that!’

I asked how they were rich if none of them earned money. She replied that their ancestors had saved for them, and they never spent. When they wanted money they sold a few of their gems.

‘But there must be some poor!’ I said.

‘I suppose there must be, but we never think of such people. When one goes poor, we forget him. That is how we keep rich. We mean to be rich always.’

‘But when you have dug up all your precious stones and sold them, you will have to spend your money, and one day you will have none left!’

‘We have so many, and there are so many still in the ground, that that day will never come,’ she replied.

‘Suppose a strange people were to fall upon you, and take everything you have!’

‘No strange people will dare; they are all horribly afraid of our princess She it is who keeps us safe and free and rich!’

Every now and then as she spoke, she would stop and look behind her.

I asked why her people had such a hatred of strangers. She answered that the presence of a stranger defiled the city.

‘How is that?’ I said.

‘Because we are more ancient and noble than any other nation—Therefore,’ she added, ‘we always turn strangers out before night.’

‘How, then, can you take me into your house?’ I asked.

‘I will make an exception of you,’ she replied.

‘Is there no place in the city for the taking in of strangers?’

‘Such a place would be pulled down, and its owner burned. How is purity to be preserved except by keeping low people at a proper distance? Dignity is such a delicate thing!’

She told me that their princess had reigned for thousands of years; that she had power over the air and the water as well as the earth – and, she believed, over the fire too; that she could do what she pleased, and was answerable to nobody.

When at length she was willing to risk the attempt, we took our way through lanes and narrow passages, and reached her door without having met a single live creature. It was in a wider street, between two tall houses, at the top of a narrow, steep stair, up which she climbed slowly, and I followed. Ere we reached the top, however, she seemed to take fright, and darted up the rest of the steps: I arrived just in time to have the door closed in my face, and stood confounded on the landing, where was about length enough, between the opposite doors of the two houses, for a man to lie down.

Weary, and not scrupling to defile Bulika with my presence, I took advantage of the shelter, poor as it was.

CHAPTER 24

The White Leopardess

At the foot of the stair lay the moonlit street, and I could hear the unwholesome, inhospitable wind blowing about below. But not a breath of it entered my retreat, and I was composing myself to rest, when suddenly my eyes opened, and there was the head of the shining creature I had seen following the Shadow, just rising above the uppermost step! The moment she caught sight of my eyes, she stopped and began to retire, tail foremost. I sprang up; whereupon, having no room to turn, she threw herself backward, head over tail, scrambled to her feet, and in a moment was down the stair and gone. I followed her to the bottom, and looked all up and down the street. Not seeing her, I went back to my hard couch.

There were, then, two evil creatures prowling about the city, one with, and one without spots! I was not inclined to risk much for man or woman in Bulika, but the life of a child might well be worth such a poor one as mine, and I resolved to keep watch at that door the rest of the night.

Presently I heard the latch move, slow, slow: I looked up, and seeing the door half-open, rose and slid softly in. Behind it stood, not the woman I had befriended, but the muffled woman of the desert. Without a word she led me a few steps to an empty stone-paved chamber, and pointed to a rug on the floor. I wrapped myself in it, and once more lay down She shut the door of the room, and I heard the outer door open and close again. There was no light save what came from the moonlit air.

As I lay sleepless, I began to hear a stifled moaning. It went on for a good while, and then came the cry of a child, followed by a terrible shriek. I

sprang up and darted into the passage: from another door in it came the white leopardess with a new-born baby in her mouth, carrying it like a cub of her own. I threw myself upon her, and compelled her to drop the infant, which fell on the stone slabs with a piteous wail.

At the cry appeared the muffled woman. She stepped over us, the beast and myself, where we lay struggling in the narrow passage, took up the child, and carried it away. Returning, she lifted me off the animal, opened the door, and pushed me gently out At my heels followed the leopardess.

'She too has failed me!' thought I; '—given me up to the beast to be settled with at her leisure! But we shall have a tussle for it!'

I ran down the stair, fearing she would spring on my back, but she followed me quietly. At the foot I turned to lay hold of her, but she sprang over my head; and when again I turned to face her, she was crouching at my feet! I stooped and stroked her lovely white skin; she responded by licking my bare feet with her hard dry tongue. Then I patted and fondled her, a well of tenderness overflowing in my heart: she might be treacherous too, but if I turned from every show of love lest it should be feigned, how was I ever to find the real love which must be somewhere in every world?

I stood up; she rose, and stood beside me.

A bulky object fell with a heavy squelch in the middle of the street, a few yards from us. I ran to it, and found a pulpy mass, with just form enough left to show it the body of a woman. It must have been thrown from some neighbouring window! I looked around me; the Shadow was walking along the other side of the way, with the white leopardess again at his heel!

I followed and gained upon them, urging in my heart for the leopardess that probably she was not a free agent When I got near them, however, she turned and flew at me with such a hideous snarl, that instinctively I drew back: instantly she resumed her place behind the Shadow. Again I drew near; again she flew at me, her eyes flaming like live emeralds. Once more I made the experiment: she snapped at me like a dog, and bit me. My heart gave way, and I uttered a cry; whereupon the creature looked round with a glance that plainly meant – 'Why *would* you make me do it?'

I turned away angry with myself: I had been losing my time ever since I entered the place! night as it was, I would go straight to the palace! From the square I had seen it – high above the heart of the city, compassed with many defences, more a fortress, than a palace!

But I found its fortifications, like those of the city, much neglected, and partly ruinous. For centuries, clearly, they had been of no account! It had great and strong gates, with something like a drawbridge to them over a rocky chasm; but they stood open, and it was hard to believe that water had ever occupied the hollow before them. All was so still that sleep seemed to interpenetrate the structure, causing the very moonlight to look discordantly awake. I must either enter like a thief, or break a silence that rendered frightful the mere thought of a sound!

Like an outcast dog I was walking about the walls, when I came to a little recess with a stone bench: I took refuge in it from the wind, lay down, and in spite of the cold fell fast asleep.

I was wakened by something leaping upon me, and licking my face with the rough tongue of a feline animal. ‘It is the white leopardess!’ I thought. ‘She is come to suck my blood! – and why should she not have it? – it would cost me more to defend than to yield it!’ So I lay still, expecting a shoot of pain. But the pang did not arrive; a pleasant warmth instead began to diffuse itself through me. Stretched at my back, she lay as close to me as she could lie, the heat of her body slowly penetrating mine, and her breath, which had nothing of the wild beast in it, swathing my head and face in a genial atmosphere. A full conviction that her intention toward me was good, gained possession of me. I turned like a sleepy boy, threw my arm over her, and sank into profound unconsciousness.

When I began to come to myself, I fancied I lay warm and soft in my own bed. ‘Is it possible I am at home?’ I thought. The well-known scents of the garden seemed to come crowding in I rubbed my eyes, and looked out: I lay on a bare stone, in the heart of a hateful city!

I sprang from the bench. Had I indeed had a leopardess for my bedfellow, or had I but dreamed it? She had but just left me, for the warmth of her body was with me yet!

I left the recess with a new hope, as strong as it was shapeless. One thing only was clear to me: I must find the princess! Surely I had some power with her, if not over her! Had I not saved her life, and had she not prolonged it at the expense of my vitality? The reflection gave me courage to encounter her, be she what she might.

CHAPTER 25

The Princess

Making a circuit of the castle, I came again to the open gates, crossed the ravine-like moat, and found myself in a paved court, planted at regular intervals with towering trees like poplars. In the centre was one taller than the rest, whose branches, near the top, spread a little and gave it some resemblance to a palm. Between their great stems I got glimpses of the palace, which was of a style strange to me, but suggested Indian origin. It was long and low, with lofty towers at the corners, and one huge dome in the middle, rising from the roof to half the height of the towers. The main entrance was in the centre of the front – a low arch that seemed half an ellipse. No one was visible, the doors stood wide open, and I went unchallenged into a large hall, in the form of a longish ellipse. Toward one side stood a cage, in which couched, its head on its paws, a huge leopardess, chained by a steel collar, with its mouth muzzled and its paws muffled. It was white with dark oval spots, and lay staring out of wide-open eyes, with canoe-shaped pupils, and great green irids. It appeared to watch me, but not an eyeball, not a foot, not a whisker moved, and its tail stretched out behind it rigid as an iron bar. I could not tell whether it was a live thing or not.

From this vestibule two low passages led; I took one of them, and found it branch into many, all narrow and irregular. At a spot where was scarce room for two to pass, a page ran against me. He started back in terror, but having scanned me, gathered impudence, puffed himself out, and asked my business.

‘To see the princess,’ I answered.

‘A likely thing!’ he returned. ‘I have not seen her highness this morning myself!’

I caught him by the back of the neck, shook him, and said,

‘Take me to her at once, or I will drag you with me till I find her. She shall know how her servants receive her visitors.’

He gave a look at me, and began to pull like a blind man’s dog, leading me thus to a large kitchen, where were many servants, feebly busy, and hardly awake. I expected them to fall upon me and drive me out, but they stared instead, with wide eyes – not at me, but at something behind me, and grew more ghastly as they stared. I turned my head, and saw the white leopardess, regarding them in a way that might have feared stouter hearts.

Presently, however, one of them, seeing, I suppose, that attack was not imminent, began to recover himself; I turned to him, and let the boy go.

‘Take me to the princess,’ I said.

‘She has not yet left her room, your lordship,’ he replied.

‘Let her know that I am here, waiting audience of her.’

‘Will your lordship please to give me your name?’

‘Tell her that one who knows the white leech desires to see her.’

‘She will kill me if I take such a message: I must not. I dare not.’

‘You refuse?’

He cast a glance at my attendant, and went.

The others continued staring – too much afraid of her to take their eyes off her. I turned to the graceful creature, where she stood, her muzzle dropped to my heel, white as milk, a warm splendour in the gloomy place, and stooped and patted her. She looked up at me; the mere movement of her head was enough to scatter them in all directions. She rose on her hind legs, and put her paws on my shoulders; I threw my arms round her. She pricked her ears, broke from me, and was out of sight in a moment.

The man I had sent to the princess entered.

‘Please to come this way, my lord,’ he said.

My heart gave a throb, as if bracing itself to the encounter. I followed him through many passages, and was at last shown into a room so large and so dark that its walls were invisible. A single spot on the floor reflected a little light, but around that spot all was black. I looked up, and saw at a great height an oval aperture in the roof, on the periphery of which

appeared the joints between blocks of black marble. The light on the floor showed close fitting slabs of the same material. I found afterwards that the elliptical wall as well was of black marble, absorbing the little light that reached it. The roof was the long half of an ellipsoid, and the opening in it was over one of the foci of the ellipse of the floor. I fancied I caught sight of reddish lines, but when I would have examined them, they were gone.

All at once, a radiant form stood in the centre of the darkness, flashing a splendour on every side. Over a robe of soft white, her hair streamed in a cataract, black as the marble on which it fell. Her eyes were a luminous blackness; her arms and feet like warm ivory. She greeted me with the innocent smile of a girl – and in face, figure, and motion seemed but now to have stepped over the threshold of womanhood. 'Alas,' thought I, 'ill did I reckon my danger! Can this be the woman I rescued – she who struck me, scorned me, left me?' I stood gazing at her out of the darkness, she stood gazing into it, as if searching for me.

She disappeared. 'She will not acknowledge me!' I thought. But the next instant her eyes flashed out of the dark straight into mine. She had descried me and come to me!

'You have found me at last!' she said, laying her hand on my shoulder. 'I knew you would!'

My frame quivered with conflicting consciousnesses, to analyse which I had no power. I was simultaneously attracted and repelled: each sensation seemed either.

'You shiver!' she said. 'This place is cold for you! Come.'

I stood silent: she had struck me dumb with beauty; she held me dumb with sweetness.

Taking me by the hand, she drew me to the spot of light, and again flashed upon me. An instant she stood there.

'You have grown brown since last I saw you,' she said.

'This is almost the first roof I have been under since you left me,' I replied.

'Whose was the other?' she rejoined.

'I do not know the woman's name.'

'I would gladly learn it! The instinct of hospitality is not strong in my people!'

She took me again by the hand, and led me through the darkness many steps to a curtain of black. Beyond it was a white stair, up which she conducted me to a beautiful chamber.

'How you must miss the hot flowing river!' she said. 'But there is a bath in the corner with no white leeches in it! At the foot of your couch you will find a garment. When you come down, I shall be in the room to your left at the foot of the stair.'

I stood as she left me, accusing my presumption: how was I to treat this lovely woman as a thing of evil, who behaved to me like a sister? – Whence the marvellous change in her? She left me with a blow; she received me almost with an embrace! She had reviled me; she said she knew I would follow and find her! Did she know my doubts concerning her – how much I should want explained? *Could* she explain all? Could I believe her if she did? As to her hospitality, I had surely earned and might accept that – at least until I came to a definite judgment concerning her!

Could such beauty as I saw, and such wickedness as I suspected, exist in the same person? If they could, *how* was it possible? Unable to answer the former question, I must let the latter wait!

Clear as crystal, the water in the great white bath sent a sparkling flash from the corner where it lay sunk in the marble floor, and seemed to invite me to its embrace. Except the hot stream, two draughts in the cottage of the veiled woman, and the pools in the track of the wounded leopardess, I had not seen water since leaving home; it looked a thing celestial. I plunged in.

Immediately my brain was filled with an odour strange and delicate, which yet I did not altogether like. It made me doubt the princess afresh: had she medicated it? had she enchanted it? was she in any way working on me unlawfully? And how was there water in the palace, and not a drop in the city? I remembered the crushed paw of the leopardess, and sprang from the bath.

What had I been bathing in? Again I saw the fleeing mother, again I heard the howl, again I saw the limping beast. But what matter whence it flowed? was not the water sweet? Was it not very water the pitcher-plant secreted from its heart, and stored for the weary traveller? Water came from heaven: what mattered the well where it gathered, or the spring whence it burst? But I did not re-enter the bath.

I put on the robe of white wool, embroidered on the neck and hem, that lay ready for me, and went down the stair to the room whither my hostess had directed me. It was round, all of alabaster, and without a single window: The light came through everywhere, a soft, pearly shimmer rather than shine. Vague shadowy forms went flitting about over the walls and low dome, like loose rain-clouds over a grey-blue sky.

The princess stood waiting me, in a robe embroidered with argentine rings and discs, rectangles and lozenges, close together – a silver mail. It fell unbroken from her neck and hid her feet, but its long open sleeves left her arms bare.

In the room was a table of ivory, bearing cakes and fruit, an ivory jug of milk, a crystal jug of wine of a pale rose-colour, and a white loaf.

'Here we do not kill to eat,' she said, 'but I think you will like what I can give you.'

I told her I could desire nothing better than what I saw. She seated herself on a couch by the table, and made me a sign to sit by her.

She poured me out a bowlful of milk, and, handing me the loaf, begged me to break from it such a piece as I liked. Then she filled from the wine-jug two silver goblets of grotesquely graceful workmanship.

'You have never drunk wine like this!' she said.

I drank, and wondered: every flower of Hybla and Hymettus must have sent its ghost to swell the soul of that wine!

'And now that you will be able to listen,' she went on, 'I must do what I can to make myself intelligible to you. Our natures, however, are so different, that this may not be easy. Men and women live but to die; we, that is such as I – we are but a few – live to live on. Old age is to you a horror; to me it is a dear desire: the older we grow, the nearer we are to our perfection. Your perfection is a poor thing, comes soon, and lasts but a little while; ours is a ceaseless ripening. I am not yet ripe, and have lived thousands of your years – how many, I never cared to note. The everlasting will not be measured.

'Many lovers have sought me; I have loved none of them: they sought but to enslave me; they sought me but as the men of my city seek gems of price. – When you found me, I found a man! I put you to the test; you stood it; your love was genuine! – It was, however, far from ideal – far from such love as I would have. You loved me truly, but not with true love. Pity has,

but is not love. What woman of any world would return love for pity? Such love as yours was then, is hateful to me. I knew that, if you saw me as I am, you would love me – like the rest of them – to have and to hold: I would none of that either! I would be otherwise loved! I would have a love that outlived hopelessness, outmeasured indifference, hate, scorn! Therefore did I put on cruelty, despite, ingratitude. When I left you, I had shown myself such as you could at least no longer follow from pity: I was no longer in need of you! But you must satisfy my desire or set me free – prove yourself priceless or worthless! To satisfy the hunger of my love, you must follow me, looking for nothing, not gratitude, not even pity in return! – follow and find me, and be content with merest presence, with scantest forbearance! – I, not you, have failed; I yield the contest.'

She looked at me tenderly, and hid her face in her hands. But I had caught a flash and a sparkle behind the tenderness, and did not believe her. She laid herself out to secure and enslave me; she only fascinated me!

'Beautiful princess,' I said, 'let me understand how you came to be found in such evil plight.'

'There are things I cannot explain,' she replied, 'until you have become capable of understanding them – which can only be when love is grown perfect. There are many things so hidden from you that you cannot even wish to know them, but any question you can put, I can in some measure answer.

'I had set out to visit a part of my dominions occupied by a savage dwarf-people, strong and fierce, enemies to law and order, opposed to every kind of progress – an evil race. I went alone, fearing nothing, unaware of the least necessity for precaution. I did not know that upon the hot stream beside which you found me, a certain woman, by no means so powerful as myself, not being immortal, had cast what you call a spell – which is merely the setting in motion of a force as natural as any other, but operating primarily in a region beyond the ken of the mortal who makes use of the force.

'I set out on my journey, reached the stream, bounded across it—'

A shadow of embarrassment darkened her cheek: I understood it, but showed no sign. Checked for the merest moment, she went on:

'—you know what a step it is in parts! – But in the very act, an indescribable cold invaded me. I recognised at once the nature of the

assault, and knew it could affect me but temporarily. By sheer force of will I dragged myself to the wood – nor knew anything more until I saw you asleep, and the horrible worm at your neck. I crept out, dragged the monster from you, and laid my lips to the wound. You began to wake; I buried myself among the leaves.'

She rose, her eyes flashing as never human eyes flashed, and threw her arms high over her head.

'What you have made me is yours!' she cried. 'I will repay you as never yet did woman! My power, my beauty, my love are your own: take them.'

She dropt kneeling beside me, laid her arms across my knees, and looked up in my face.

Then first I noted on her left hand a large clumsy glove. In my mind's eye I saw hair and claws under it, but I knew it was a hand shut hard – perhaps badly bruised. I glanced at the other: it was lovely as hand could be, and I felt that, if I did less than loathe her, I should love her. Not to dally with usurping emotions, I turned my eyes aside.

She started to her feet. I sat motionless, looking down.

'To me she may be true!' said my vanity. For a moment I was tempted to love a lie.

An odour, rather than the gentlest of airy pulses, was fanning me. I glanced up. She stood erect before me waving her lovely arms in seemingly mystic fashion.

A frightful roar made my heart rebound against the walls of its cage. The alabaster trembled as if it would shake into shivers. The princess shuddered visibly.

'My wine was too strong for you!' she said, in a quavering voice; 'I ought not to have let you take a full draught! Go and sleep now, and when you wake ask me what you please – I will go with you: come.'

As she preceded me up the stair,—

'I do not wonder that roar startled you!' she said. 'It startled me, I confess: for a moment I feared she had escaped. But that is impossible.'

The roar seemed to me, however – I could not tell why – to come from the *white* leopardess, and to be meant for me, not the princess.

With a smile she left me at the door of my room, but as she turned I read anxiety on her beautiful face.

CHAPTER 26

A Battle Royal

I threw myself on the bed, and began to turn over in my mind the tale she had told me. She had forgotten herself, and, by a single incautious word, removed one perplexity as to the condition in which I found her in the forest! The leopardess *bounded* over; the princess lay prostrate on the bank: the running stream had dissolved her self-enchantment! Her own account of the object of her journey revealed the danger of the Little Ones then imminent: I had saved the life of their one fearful enemy!

I had but reached this conclusion when I fell asleep. The lovely wine may not have been quite innocent.

When I opened my eyes, it was night. A lamp, suspended from the ceiling, cast a clear, although soft light through the chamber. A delicious languor infolded me. I seemed floating, far from land, upon the bosom of a twilight sea. Existence was in itself pleasure. I had no pain. Surely I was dying!

No pain! – ah, what a shoot of mortal pain was that! what a sickening sting! It went through my heart! Again! That was sharpness itself! – and so sickening! I could not move my hand to lay it on my heart; something kept it down!

The pain was dying away, but my whole body seemed paralysed. Some evil thing was upon me! – something hateful! I would have struggled, but could not reach a struggle. My will agonised, but in vain, to assert itself. I desisted, and lay passive. Then I became aware of a soft hand on my face, pressing my head into the pillow, and of a heavy weight lying across me.

I began to breathe more freely; the weight was gone from my chest; I opened my eyes.

The princess was standing above me on the bed, looking out into the room, with the air of one who dreamed. Her great eyes were clear and calm. Her mouth wore a look of satisfied passion; she wiped from it a streak of red.

She caught my gaze, bent down, and struck me on the eyes with the handkerchief in her hand: it was like drawing the edge of a knife across them, and for a moment or two I was blind.

I heard a dull heavy sound, as of a large soft-footed animal alighting from a little jump. I opened my eyes, and saw the great swing of a long tail as it disappeared through the half-open doorway. I sprang after it.

The creature had vanished quite. I shot down the stair, and into the hall of alabaster. The moon was high, and the place like the inside of a faint, sun-blanched moon. The princess was not there. I must find her: in her presence I might protect myself; out of it I could not! I was a tame animal for her to feed upon; a human fountain for a thirst demoniac! She showed me favour the more easily to use me! My waking eyes did not fear her, but they would close, and she would come! Not seeing her, I felt her everywhere, for she might be anywhere – might even now be waiting me in some secret cavern of sleep! Only with my eyes upon her could I feel safe from her!

Outside the alabaster hall it was pitch-dark, and I had to grope my way along with hands and feet. At last I felt a curtain, put it aside, and entered the black hall. There I found a great silent assembly. How it was visible I neither saw nor could imagine, for the walls, the floor, the roof, were shrouded in what seemed an infinite blackness, blacker than the blackest of moonless, starless nights; yet my eyes could separate, although vaguely, not a few of the individuals in the mass interpenetrated and divided, as well as surrounded, by the darkness. It seemed as if my eyes would never come quite to themselves. I pressed their balls and looked and looked again, but what I saw would not grow distinct. Blackness mingled with form, silence and undefined motion possessed the wide space. All was a dim, confused dance, filled with recurrent glimpses of shapes not unknown to me. Now appeared a woman, with glorious eyes looking out of a skull; now an armed figure on a skeleton horse; now one now another of the hideous burrowing phantasms. I could trace no order and little relation in the mingling and

crossing currents and eddies. If I seemed to catch the shape and rhythm of a dance, it was but to see it break, and confusion prevail. With the shifting colours of the seemingly more solid shapes, mingled a multitude of shadows, independent apparently of originals, each moving after its own free shadow-will. I looked everywhere for the princess, but throughout the wildly changing kaleidoscopic scene, could not see her nor discover indication of her presence. Where was she? What might she not be doing? No one took the least notice of me as I wandered hither and thither seeking her. At length losing hope, I turned away to look elsewhere. Finding the wall, and keeping to it with my hand, for even then I could not see it, I came, groping along, to a curtained opening into the vestibule.

Dimly moonlighted, the cage of the leopardess was the arena of what seemed a desperate although silent struggle. Two vastly differing forms, human and bestial, with entangled confusion of mingling bodies and limbs, writhed and wrestled in closest embrace. It had lasted but an instant when I saw the leopardess out of the cage, walking quietly to the open door. As I hastened after her I threw a glance behind me: there was the leopardess in the cage, couching motionless as when I saw her first.

The moon, half-way up the sky, was shining round and clear; the bodiless shadow I had seen the night before, was walking through the trees toward the gate; and after him went the leopardess, swinging her tail. I followed, a little way off, as silently as they, and neither of them once looked round. Through the open gate we went down to the city, lying quiet as the moonshine upon it. The face of the moon was very still, and its stillness looked like that of expectation.

The Shadow took his way straight to the stair at the top of which I had lain the night before. Without a pause he went up, and the leopardess followed. I quickened my pace, but, a moment after, heard a cry of horror. Then came the fall of something soft and heavy between me and the stair, and at my feet lay a body, frightfully blackened and crushed, but still recognisable as that of the woman who had led me home and shut me out. As I stood petrified, the spotted leopardess came bounding down the stair with a baby in her mouth. I darted to seize her ere she could turn at the foot; but that instant, from behind me, the white leopardess, like a great bar of glowing silver, shot through the moonlight, and had her by the neck. She

dropped the child; I caught it up, and stood to watch the battle between them.

What a sight it was – now the one, now the other uppermost, both too intent for any noise beyond a low growl, a whimpered cry, or a snarl of hate – followed by a quicker scrambling of claws, as each, worrying and pushing and dragging, struggled for foothold on the pavement! The spotted leopardess was larger than the white, and I was anxious for my friend; but I soon saw that, though neither stronger nor more active, the white leopardess had the greater endurance. Not once did she lose her hold on the neck of the other. From the spotted throat at length issued a howl of agony, changing, by swift-crowded gradations, into the long-drawn *crescendo* of a woman's uttermost wail. The white one relaxed her jaws; the spotted one drew herself away, and rose on her hind legs. Erect in the moonlight stood the princess, a confused rush of shadows careering over her whiteness – the spots of the leopard crowding, hurrying, fleeing to the refuge of her eyes, where merging they vanished. The last few, outsped and belated, mingled with the cloud of her streamy hair, leaving her radiant as the moon when a legion of little vapours has flown, wind-hunted, off her silvery disc – save that, adown the white column of her throat, a thread of blood still trickled from every wound of her adversary's terrible teeth. She turned away, took a few steps with the gait of a Hecate, fell, covered afresh with her spots, and fled at a long, stretching gallop.

The white leopardess turned also, sprang upon me, pulled my arms asunder, caught the baby as it fell, and flew with it along the street toward the gate.

CHAPTER 27

The Silent Fountain

I turned and followed the spotted leopardess, catching but one glimpse of her as she tore up the brow of the hill to the gate of the palace. When I reached the entrance-hall, the princess was just throwing the robe around her which she had left on the floor. The blood had ceased to flow from her wounds, and had dried in the wind of her flight.

When she saw me, a flash of anger crossed her face, and she turned her head aside. Then, with an attempted smile, she looked at me, and said,

'I have met with a small accident! Happening to hear that the cat-woman was again in the city, I went down to send her away. But she had one of her horrid creatures with her: it sprang upon me, and had its claws in my neck before I could strike it!'

She gave a shiver, and I could not help pitying her, although I knew she lied, for her wounds were real, and her face reminded me of how she looked in the cave. My heart began to reproach me that I had let her fight unaided, and I suppose I looked the compassion I felt.

'Child of folly!' she said, with another attempted smile, '—not crying, surely! – Wait for me here; I am going into the black hall for a moment. I want you to get me something for my scratches.'

But I followed her close. Out of my sight I feared her.

The instant the princess entered, I heard a buzzing sound as of many low voices, and, one portion after another, the assembly began to be shiftingly illuminated, as by a ray that went traveling from spot to spot. Group after group would shine out for a space, then sink back into the general

vagueness, while another part of the vast company would grow momently bright.

Some of the actions going on when thus illuminated, were not unknown to me; I had been in them, or had looked on them, and so had the princess: present with every one of them I now saw her. The skull-headed dancers footed the grass in the forest-hall: there was the princess looking in at the door! The fight went on in the Evil Wood: there was the princess urging it! Yet I was close behind her all the time, she standing motionless, her head sunk on her bosom. The confused murmur continued, the confused commotion of colours and shapes; and still the ray went shifting and showing. It settled at last on the hollow in the heath, and there was the princess, walking up and down, and trying in vain to wrap the vapour around her! Then first I was startled at what I saw: the old librarian walked up to her, and stood for a moment regarding her; she fell; her limbs forsook her and fled; her body vanished.

A wild shriek rang through the echoing place, and with the fall of her eidolon, the princess herself, till then standing like a statue in front of me, fell heavily, and lay still. I turned at once and went out: not again would I seek to restore her! As I stood trembling beside the cage, I knew that in the black ellipsoid I had been in the brain of the princess! – I saw the tail of the leopardess quiver once.

While still endeavouring to compose myself, I heard the voice of the princess beside me.

‘Come now,’ she said; ‘I will show you what I want you to do for me.’

She led the way into the court. I followed in dazed compliance.

The moon was near the zenith, and her present silver seemed brighter than the gold of the absent sun. She brought me through the trees to the tallest of them, the one in the centre. It was not quite like the rest, for its branches, drawing their ends together at the top, made a clump that looked from beneath like a fir-cone. The princess stood close under it, gazing up, and said, as if talking to herself,

‘On the summit of that tree grows a tiny blossom which would at once heal my scratches! I might be a dove for a moment and fetch it, but I see a little snake in the leaves whose bite would be worse to a dove than the bite of a tiger to me! – How I hate that cat-woman!’

She turned to me quickly, saying with one of her sweetest smiles,

‘Can you climb?’

The smile vanished with the brief question, and her face changed to a look of sadness and suffering. I ought to have left her to suffer, but the way she put her hand to her wounded neck went to my heart.

I considered the tree. All the way up to the branches, were projections on the stem like the remnants on a palm of its fallen leaves.

‘I can climb that tree,’ I answered.

‘Not with bare feet!’ she returned.

In my haste to follow the leopardess disappearing, I had left my sandals in my room.

‘It is no matter,’ I said, ‘I have long gone barefoot!’

Again I looked at the tree, and my eyes went wandering up the stem until my sight lost itself in the branches. The moon shone like silvery foam here and there on the rugged bole, and a little rush of wind went through the top with a murmurous sound as of water falling softly into water. I approached the tree to begin my ascent of it. The princess stopped me.

‘I cannot let you attempt it with your feet bare!’ she insisted ‘A fall from the top would kill you!’

‘So would a bite from the snake!’ I answered – not believing, I confess, that there was any snake.

‘It would not hurt *you*!’ she replied. ‘—Wait a moment.’

She tore from her garment the two wide borders that met in front, and kneeling on one knee, made me put first my left foot, then my right on the other, and bound them about with the thick embroidered strips.

‘You have left the ends hanging, princess!’ I said.

‘I have nothing to cut them off with; but they are not long enough to get entangled,’ she replied.

I turned to the tree, and began to climb.

Now in Bulika the cold after sundown was not so great as in certain other parts of the country – especially about the sexton’s cottage; yet when I had climbed a little way, I began to feel very cold, grew still colder as I ascended, and became coldest of all when I got among the branches. Then I shivered, and seemed to have lost my hands and feet.

There was hardly any wind, and the branches did not sway in the least, yet, as I approached the summit, I became aware of a peculiar unsteadiness: every branch on which I placed foot or laid hold, seemed on the point of

giving way. When my head rose above the branches near the top, and in the open moonlight I began to look about for the blossom, that instant I found myself drenched from head to foot. The next, as if plunged in a stormy water, I was flung about wildly, and felt myself sinking. Tossed up and down, tossed this way and tossed that way, rolled over and over, checked, rolled the other way and tossed up again, I was sinking lower and lower. Gasping and gurgling and choking, I fell at last upon a solid bottom.

'I told you so!' croaked a voice in my ear.

CHAPTER 28

I am Silenced

I rubbed the water out of my eyes, and saw the raven on the edge of a huge stone basin. With the cold light of the dawn reflected from his glossy plumage, he stood calmly looking down upon me. I lay on my back in water, above which, leaning on my elbows, I just lifted my face. I was in the basin of the large fountain constructed by my father in the middle of the lawn. High over me glimmered the thick, steel-shiny stalk, shooting, with a torrent uprush, a hundred feet into the air, to spread in a blossom of foam.

Nettled at the coolness of the raven's remark,

'You told me nothing!' I said.

'I told you to do nothing any one you distrusted asked you!'

'Tut! how was mortal to remember that?'

'You will not forget the consequences of having forgotten it!' replied Mr Raven, who stood leaning over the margin of the basin, and stretched his hand across to me.

I took it, and was immediately beside him on the lawn, dripping and streaming.

'You must change your clothes at once!' he said. 'A wetting does not signify where you come from – though at present such an accident is unusual; here it has its inconveniences!'

He was again a raven, walking, with something stately in his step, toward the house, the door of which stood open.

'I have not much to change!' I laughed; for I had flung aside my robe to climb the tree.

‘It is a long time since I moulted a feather!’ said the raven.

In the house no one seemed awake. I went to my room, found a dressing-gown, and descended to the library.

As I entered, the librarian came from the closet. I threw myself on a couch. Mr Raven drew a chair to my side and sat down. For a minute or two neither spoke. I was the first to break the silence.

‘What does it all mean?’ I said.

‘A good question!’ he rejoined: ‘nobody knows what anything is; a man can learn only what a thing means! Whether he do, depends on the use he is making of it.’

‘I have made no use of anything yet!’

‘Not much; but you know the fact, and that is something! Most people take more than a lifetime to learn that they have learned nothing, and done less! At least you have not been without the desire to be of use!’

‘I did want to do something for the children – the precious Little Ones, I mean.’

‘I know you did – and started the wrong way!’

‘I did not know the right way.’

‘That is true also – but you are to blame that you did not.’

‘I am ready to believe whatever you tell me – as soon as I understand what it means.’

‘Had you accepted our invitation, you would have known the right way. When a man will not act where he is, he must go far to find his work.’

‘Indeed I have gone far, and got nowhere, for I have not found my work! I left the children to learn how to serve them, and have only learned the danger they are in.’

‘When you were with them, you were where you could help them: you left your work to look for it! It takes a wise man to know when to go away; a fool may learn to go back at once!’

‘Do you mean, sir, I could have done something for the Little Ones by staying with them?’

‘Could you teach them anything by leaving them?’

‘No; but how could I teach them? I did not know how to begin. Besides, they were far ahead of me!’

‘That is true. But you were not a rod to measure them with! Certainly, if they knew what you know, not to say what you might have known, they

would be ahead of you – out of sight ahead! but you saw they were not growing – or growing so slowly that they had not yet developed the idea of growing! they were even afraid of growing! – You had never seen children remain children!'

'But surely I had no power to make them grow!'

'You might have removed some of the hindrances to their growing!'

'What are they? I do not know them. I did think perhaps it was the want of water!'

'Of course it is! they have none to cry with!'

'I would gladly have kept them from requiring any for that purpose!'

'No doubt you would – the aim of all stupid philanthropists! Why, Mr Vane, but for the weeping in it, your world would never have become worth saving! You confess you thought it might be water they wanted: why did not you dig them a well or two?'

'That never entered my mind!'

'Not when the sounds of the waters under the earth entered your ears?'

'I believe it did once. But I was afraid of the giants for them. That was what made me bear so much from the brutes myself!'

'Indeed you almost taught the noble little creatures to be afraid of the stupid Bags! While they fed and comforted and worshipped you, all the time you submitted to be the slave of bestial men! You gave the darlings a seeming coward for their hero! A worse wrong you could hardly have done them. They gave you their hearts; you owed them your soul! – You might by this time have made the Bags hewers of wood and drawers of water to the Little Ones!'

'I fear what you say is true, Mr Raven! But indeed I was afraid that more knowledge might prove an injury to them – render them less innocent, less lovely.'

'They had given you no reason to harbour such a fear!'

'Is not a little knowledge a dangerous thing?'

'That is one of the pet falsehoods of your world! Is man's greatest knowledge more than a little? or is it therefore dangerous? The fancy that knowledge is in itself a great thing, would make any degree of knowledge more dangerous than any amount of ignorance. To know all things would not be greatness.'

‘At least it was for love of them, not from cowardice that I served the giants!’

‘Granted. But you ought to have served the Little Ones, not the giants! You ought to have given the Little Ones water; then they would soon have taught the giants their true position. In the meantime you could yourself have made the giants cut down two-thirds of their coarse fruit-trees to give room to the little delicate ones! You lost your chance with the Lovers, Mr Vane! You speculated about them instead of helping them!’

CHAPTER 29

The Persian Cat

I sat in silence and shame. What he said was true: I had not been a wise neighbour to the Little Ones!

Mr Raven resumed:

‘You wronged at the same time the stupid creatures themselves. For them slavery would have been progress. To them a few such lessons as you could have given them with a stick from one of their own trees, would have been invaluable.’

‘I did not know they were cowards!’

‘What difference does that make? The man who grounds his action on another’s cowardice, is essentially a coward himself. – I fear worse will come of it! By this time the Little Ones might have been able to protect themselves from the princess, not to say the giants – they were always fit enough for that; as it was they laughed at them! but now, through your relations with her—’

‘I hate her!’ I cried.

‘Did you let her know you hated her?’

Again I was silent.

‘Not even to her have you been faithful! – But hush! we were followed from the fountain, I fear!’

‘No living creature did I see! – except a disreputable-looking cat that bolted into the shrubbery.’

‘It was a magnificent Persian – so wet and draggled, though, as to look what she was – worse than disreputable!’

‘What do you mean, Mr Raven?’ I cried, a fresh horror taking me by the throat. ‘—There was a beautiful blue Persian about the house, but she fled at the very sound of water! – Could she have been after the goldfish?’

‘We shall see!’ returned the librarian. ‘I know a little about cats of several sorts, and there is that in the room which will unmask this one, or I am mistaken in her.’

He rose, went to the door of the closet, brought from it the mutilated volume, and sat down again beside me. I stared at the book in his hand: it was a whole book, entire and sound!

‘Where was the other half of it?’ I gasped.

‘Sticking through into my library,’ he answered.

I held my peace. A single question more would have been a plunge into a bottomless sea, and there might be no time!

‘Listen,’ he said: ‘I am going to read a stanza or two. There is one present who, I imagine, will hardly enjoy the reading!’

He opened the vellum cover, and turned a leaf or two. The parchment was discoloured with age, and one leaf showed a dark stain over two-thirds of it. He slowly turned this also, and seemed looking for a certain passage in what appeared a continuous poem. Somewhere about the middle of the book he began to read.

But what follows represents – not what he read, only the impression it made upon me. The poem seemed in a language I had never before heard, which yet I understood perfectly, although I could not write the words, or give their meaning save in poor approximation. These fragments, then, are the shapes which those he read have finally taken in passing again through my brain: –

‘But if I found a man that could believe
In what he saw not, felt not, and yet knew,
From him I should take substance, and receive
Firmness and form relate to touch and view;
Then should I clothe me in the likeness true
Of that idea where his soul did cleave!’

He turned a leaf and read again: –

‘In me was every woman, I had power
Over the soul of every living man,
Such as no woman ever had in dower—
Could what no woman ever could, or can;
All women, I, the woman, still outran,
Outsoared, outsank, outreigned, in hall or bower.

‘For I, though me he neither saw nor heard,
Nor with his hand could touch finger of mine,
Although not once my breath had ever stirred
A hair of him, could trammel brain and spine
With rooted bonds which Death could not untwine—
Or life, though hope was evermore deferred.’

Again he paused, again turned a leaf, and again began: –

‘For by his side I lay, a bodiless thing;
I breathed not, saw not, felt not, only thought,
And made him love me – with a hungering
After he knew not what – if it was aught
Or but a nameless something that was wrought
By him out of himself; for I did sing

‘A song that had no sound into his soul;
I lay a heartless thing against his heart,
Giving him nothing where he gave his whole
Being to clothe me human, every part:
That I at last into his sense might dart,
Thus first into his living mind I stole.

‘Ah, who was ever conquering Love but I!
Who else did ever throne in heart of man!
To visible being, with a gladsome cry
Waking, life’s tremor through me throbbing ran!’

A strange, repulsive feline wail arose somewhere in the room. I started up on my elbow and stared about me, but could see nothing.

Mr Raven turned several leaves, and went on: –

‘Sudden I woke, nor knew the ghastly fear
That held me – not like serpent coiled about,
But like a vapour moist, corrupt, and drear,
Filling heart, soul, and breast and brain throughout;
My being lay motionless in sickening doubt,
Nor dared to ask how came the horror here.

‘My past entire I knew, but not my now;
I understood nor what I was, nor where;
I knew what I had been: still on my brow
I felt the touch of what no more was there!
I was a fainting, dead, yet live Despair;
A life that flouted life with mop and mow!

‘That I was a queen I knew right well,
And sometimes wore a splendour on my head
Whose flashing even dead darkness could not quell—
The like on neck and arms and girdle-stead:
And men declared a light my closed eyes shed
That killed the diamond in its silver cell.’

Again I heard the ugly cry of feline pain. Again I looked, but saw neither shape nor motion. Mr Raven seemed to listen a moment, but again turned several pages, and resumed: –

‘Hideously wet, my hair of golden hue
Fouled my fair hands: to have it swiftly shorn
I had given my rubies, all for me dug new—
No eyes had seen, and such no waist had worn!
For a draught of water from a drinking horn,
For one blue breath, I had given my sapphires blue!

‘Nay, I had given my opals for a smock,
A peasant-maiden’s garment, coarse and clean:
My shroud was rotting! Once I heard a cock

Lustily crow upon the hillock green
Over my coffin. Dulled by space between,
Came back an answer like a ghostly mock.'

Once more arose the bestial wail.

'I thought some foul thing was in the room!' said the librarian, casting a glance around him, but instantly he turned a leaf or two, and again read: –

'For I had bathed in milk and honey-dew,
In rain from roses shook, that ne're touched earth,
And ointed me with nard of amber hue;
Never had spot me spotted from my birth,
Or mole, or scar of hurt, or fret of dearth,
Never one hair superfluous on me grew.

'Fleeing cold whiteness, I would sit alone—
Not in the sun – I feared his bronzing light,
But in his radiance back around me thrown
By fulgent mirrors tempering his might;
Thus bathing in a moon-bath not too bright;
My skin I tinted slow to ivory tone.

'But now, all round was dark, dark all within!
My eyes not even gave out a phantom-flash;
My fingers sank in pulp through pulpy skin;
My body lay death-weltered in a mash
Of slimy horrors—'

With a fearsome yell, her clammy fur staring in clumps, her tail thick as a cable, her eyes flashing green as a chrysoprase, her distended claws entangling themselves so that she floundered across the carpet, a huge white cat rushed from somewhere, and made for the chimney. Quick as thought the librarian threw the manuscript between her and the hearth. She crouched instantly, her eyes fixed on the book. But his voice went on as if still he read, and his eyes seemed also fixed on the book: –

'Ah, the two worlds! so strangely are they one,

And yet so measurelessly wide apart!
Oh, had I lived the bodiless alone
And from defiling sense held safe my heart,
Then had I scaped the canker and the smart,
Scaped life-in-death, scaped misery's endless moan!'

At these words such a howling, such a prolonged yell of agony burst from the cat, that we both stopped our ears. When it ceased, Mr Raven walked to the fire-place, took up the book, and, standing between the creature and the chimney, pointed his finger at her for a moment. She lay perfectly still. He took a half-burnt stick from the hearth, drew with it some sign on the floor, put the manuscript back in its place, with a look that seemed to say, 'Now we have her, I think!' and, returning to the cat, stood over her and said, in a still, solemn voice: –

'Lilith, when you came here on the way to your evil will, you little thought into whose hands you were delivering yourself! – Mr Vane, when God created me – not out of Nothing, as say the unwise, but out of His own endless glory – He brought me an angelic splendour to be my wife: there she lies! For her first thought was *power*; she counted it slavery to be one with me, and bear children for Him who gave her being. One child, indeed, she bore; then, puffed with the fancy that she had created her, would have me fall down and worship her! Finding, however, that I would but love and honour, never obey and worship her, she poured out her blood to escape me, fled to the army of the aliens, and soon had so ensnared the heart of the great Shadow, that he became her slave, wrought her will, and made her queen of Hell. How it is with her now, she best knows, but I know also. The one child of her body she fears and hates, and would kill, asserting a right, which is a lie, over what God sent through her into His new world. Of creating, she knows no more than the crystal that takes its allotted shape, or the worm that makes two worms when it is cloven asunder. Vilest of God's creatures, she lives by the blood and lives and souls of men. She consumes and slays, but is powerless to destroy as to create.'

The animal lay motionless, its beryl eyes fixed flaming on the man: his eyes on hers held them fixed that they could not move from his.

'Then God gave me another wife – not an angel but a woman – who is to this as light is to darkness.'

The cat gave a horrible screech, and began to grow bigger. She went on growing and growing. At last the spotted leopardess uttered a roar that made the house tremble. I sprang to my feet. I do not think Mr Raven started even with his eyelids.

'It is but her jealousy that speaks,' he said, 'jealousy self-kindled, foiled and fruitless; for here I am, her master now whom she would not have for her husband! while my beautiful Eve yet lives, hoping immortally! Her hated daughter lives also, but beyond her evil ken, one day to be what she counts her destruction – for even Lilith shall be saved by her childbearing. Meanwhile she exults that my human wife plunged herself and me in despair, and has borne me a countless race of miserables; but my Eve repented, and is now beautiful as never was woman or angel, while her groaning, travailing world is the nursery of our Father's children. I too have repented, and am blessed. – Thou, Lilith, hast not yet repented; but thou must. – Tell me, is the great Shadow beautiful? Knowest thou how long thou wilt thyself remain beautiful? – Answer me, if thou knowest.'

Then at last I understood that Mr Raven was indeed Adam, the old and the new man, and that his wife, ministering in the house of the dead, was Eve, the mother of us all, the lady of the New Jerusalem.

The leopardess reared; the flickering and fleeing of her spots began; the princess at length stood radiant in her perfect shape.

'I *am* beautiful – and immortal!' she said – and she looked the goddess she would be.

'As a bush that burns, and is consumed,' answered he who had been her husband. '—What is that under thy right hand?'

For her arm lay across her bosom, and her hand was pressed to her side.

A swift pang contorted her beautiful face, and passed.

'It is but a leopard-spot that lingers! it will quickly follow those I have dismissed,' she answered.

'Thou art beautiful because God created thee, but thou art the slave of sin: take thy hand from thy side.'

Her hand sank away, and as it dropt she looked him in the eyes with a quailing fierceness that had in it no surrender.

He gazed a moment at the spot.

'It is not on the leopard; it is in the woman!' he said. 'Nor will it leave thee until it hath eaten to thy heart, and thy beauty hath flowed from thee

through the open wound!'

She gave a glance downward, and shivered.

'Lilith,' said Adam, and his tone had changed to a tender beseeching, 'hear me, and repent, and He who made thee will cleanse thee!'

Her hand returned quivering to her side. Her face grew dark. She gave the cry of one from whom hope is vanishing. The cry passed into a howl. She lay writhing on the floor, a leopardess covered with spots.

'The evil thou meditatest,' Adam resumed, 'thou shalt never compass, Lilith, for Good and not Evil is the Universe. The battle between them may last for countless ages, but it must end: how will it fare with thee when Time hath vanished in the dawn of the eternal morn? Repent, I beseech thee; repent, and be again an angel of God!'

She rose, she stood upright, a woman once more, and said,

'I will not repent, I will drink the blood of thy child.'

My eyes were fastened on the princess; but when Adam spoke, I turned to him: he stood towering above her; the form of his visage was altered, and his voice was terrible.

'Down!' he cried; 'or by the power given me I will melt thy very bones.'

She flung herself on the floor, dwindled and dwindled, and was again a gray cat. Adam caught her up by the skin of her neck, bore her to the closet, and threw her in. He described a strange figure on the threshold, and closing the door, locked it.

Then he returned to my side the old librarian, looking sad and worn, and furtively wiping tears from his eyes.

CHAPTER 30

Adam Explains

‘We must be on our guard,’ he said, ‘or she will again outwit us. She would befool the very elect!’

‘How are we to be on our guard?’ I asked.

‘Every way,’ he answered. ‘She fears, therefore hates her child, and is in this house on her way to destroy her. The birth of children is in her eyes the death of their parents, and every new generation the enemy of the last. Her daughter appears to her an open channel through which her immortality – which yet she counts self-inherent – is flowing fast away: to fill it up, almost from her birth she has pursued her with an utter enmity. But the result of her machinations hitherto is, that in the region she claims as her own, has appeared a colony of children, to which that daughter is heart and head and sheltering wings. My Eve longed after the child, and would have been to her as a mother to her first-born, but we were then unfit to train her: she was carried into the wilderness, and for ages we knew nothing of her fate. But she was divinely fostered, and had young angels for her playmates; nor did she ever know care until she found a baby in the wood, and the mother-heart in her awoke. One by one she has found many children since, and that heart is not yet full. Her family is her absorbing charge, and never children were better mothered. Her authority over them is without appeal, but it is unknown to herself, and never comes to the surface except in watchfulness and service. She has forgotten the time when she lived without them, and thinks she came herself from the wood, the first of the family.

‘You have saved the life of her and their enemy; therefore your life belongs to her and them. The princess was on her way to destroy them, but as she crossed that stream, vengeance overtook her, and she would have died had you not come to her aid. You did; and ere now she would have been raging among the Little Ones, had she dared again cross the stream. But there was yet a way to the blessed little colony through the world of the three dimensions; only, from that, by the slaying of her former body, she had excluded herself, and except in personal contact with one belonging to it, could not re-enter it. You provided the opportunity: never, in all her long years, had she had one before. Her hand, with lightest touch, was on one or other of your muffled feet, every step as you climbed. In that little chamber, she is now watching to leave it as soon as ever she may.’

‘She cannot know anything about the door! – she cannot at least know how to open it!’ I said; but my heart was not so confident as my words.

‘Hush, hush!’ whispered the librarian, with uplifted hand; ‘she can hear through anything! – You must go at once, and make your way to my wife’s cottage. I will remain to keep guard over her.’

‘Let me go to the Little Ones!’ I cried.

‘Beware of that, Mr Vane. Go to my wife, and do as she tells you.’

His advice did not recommend itself; why haste to encounter measureless delay? If not to protect the children, why go at all? Alas, even now I believed him only enough to ask him questions, not to obey him!

‘Tell me first, Mr Raven,’ I said, ‘why, of all places, you have shut her up there! The night I ran from your house, it was immediately into that closet!’

‘The closet is no nearer our cottage, and no farther from it, than any or every other place.’

‘But,’ I returned, hard to persuade where I could not understand, ‘how is it then that, when you please, you take from that same door a whole book where I saw and felt only a part of one? The other part, you have just told me, stuck through into your library: when you put it again on the shelf, will it not again stick through into that? Must not then the two places, in which parts of the same volume can at the same moment exist, lie close together? Or can one part of the book be in space, or *somewhere*, and the other out of space, or *nowhere*?’

‘I am sorry I cannot explain the thing to you,’ he answered; ‘but there is no provision in you for understanding it. Not merely, therefore, is the

phenomenon inexplicable to you, but the very nature of it is inapprehensible by you. Indeed I but partially apprehend it myself. At the same time you are constantly experiencing things which you not only do not, but cannot understand. You think you understand them, but your understanding of them is only your being used to them, and therefore not surprised at them. You accept them, not because you understand them, but because you must accept them: they are there, and have unavoidable relations with you! The fact is, no man understands anything; when he knows he does not understand, that is his first tottering step – not toward understanding, but toward the capability of one day understanding. To such things as these you are not used, therefore you do not fancy you understand them. Neither I nor any man can here help you to understand; but I may, perhaps, help you a little to believe!'

He went to the door of the closet, gave a low whistle, and stood listening. A moment after, I heard, or seemed to hear, a soft whir of wings, and, looking up, saw a white dove perch for an instant on the top of the shelves over the portrait, thence drop to Mr Raven's shoulder, and lay her head against his cheek. Only by the motions of their two heads could I tell that they were talking together; I heard nothing. Neither had I moved my eyes from them, when suddenly she was not there, and Mr Raven came back to his seat.

'Why did you whistle?' I asked. 'Surely sound here is not sound there!'

'You are right,' he answered. 'I whistled that you might know I called her. Not the whistle, but what the whistle meant reached her. – There is not a minute to lose: you must go!'

'I will at once!' I replied, and moved for the door.

'You will sleep to-night at my hostelry!' he said – not as a question, but in a tone of mild authority.

'My heart is with the children,' I replied. 'But if you insist—'

'I do insist. You can otherwise effect nothing. – I will go with you as far as the mirror, and see you off.'

He rose. There came a sudden shock in the closet. Apparently the leopardess had flung herself against the heavy door. I looked at my companion.

'Come; come!' he said.

Ere we reached the door of the library, a howling yell came after us, mingled with the noise of claws that scored at the hard oak. I hesitated, and half turned.

‘To think of her lying there alone,’ I murmured, ‘—with that terrible wound!’

‘Nothing will ever close that wound,’ he answered, with a sigh. ‘It must eat into her heart! Annihilation itself is no death to evil. Only good where evil was, is evil dead. An evil thing must live with its evil until it chooses to be good. That alone is the slaying of evil.’

I held my peace until a sound I did not understand overtook us.

‘If she should break loose!’ I cried.

‘Make haste!’ he rejoined. ‘I shall hurry down the moment you are gone, and I have disarranged the mirrors.’

We ran, and reached the wooden chamber breathless. Mr Raven seized the chains and adjusted the hood. Then he set the mirrors in their proper relation, and came beside me in front of the standing one. Already I saw the mountain range emerging from the mist.

Between us, wedging us asunder, darted, with the yell of a demon, the huge bulk of the spotted leopardess. She leaped through the mirror as through an open window, and settled at once into a low, even, swift gallop.

I cast a look of dismay at my companion, and sprang through to follow her. He came after me leisurely.

‘You need not run,’ he called, ‘you cannot overtake her. This is our way.’

As he spoke he turned in the opposite direction.

‘She has more magic at her finger-tips than I care to know!’ he added quietly.

‘We must do what we can!’ I said, and ran on, but sickening as I saw her dwindle in the distance, stopped, and went back to him.

‘Doubtless we must,’ he answered. ‘But my wife has warned Mara, and she will do her part; you must sleep first: you have given me your word!’

‘Nor do I mean to break it. But surely sleep is not the first thing! Surely, surely, action takes precedence of repose!’

‘A man can do nothing he is not fit to do. – See! did I not tell you Mara would do her part?’

I looked whither he pointed, and saw a white spot moving at an acute angle with the line taken by the leopardess.

‘There she is!’ he cried. ‘The spotted leopardess is strong, but the white is stronger!’

‘I have seen them fight: the combat did not appear decisive as to that.’

‘How should such eyes tell which have never slept? The princess did not confess herself beaten – that she never does – but she fled! When she confesses her last hope gone, that it is indeed hard to kick against the goad, then will her day begin to dawn! Come; come! He who cannot act must make haste to sleep!’

CHAPTER 31

The Sexton’s Old Horse

I stood and watched the last gleam of the white leopardess melt away, then turned to follow my guide – but reluctantly. What had I to do with sleep? Surely reason was the same in every world, and what reason could there be in going to sleep with the dead, when the hour was calling the live man? Besides, no one would wake me, and how could I be certain of waking early – of waking at all? – the sleepers in that house let morning glide into noon, and noon into night, nor ever stirred! I murmured, but followed, for I knew not what else to do.

The librarian walked on in silence, and I walked silent as he. Time and space glided past us. The sun set; it began to grow dark, and I felt in the air the spreading cold of the chamber of death. My heart sank lower and lower. I began to lose sight of the lean, long-coated figure, and at length could no more hear his swishing stride through the heather. But then I heard instead the slow-flapping wings of the raven; and, at intervals, now a firefly, now a gleaming butterfly rose into the rayless air.

By and by the moon appeared, slow crossing the far horizon.

‘You are tired, are you not, Mr Vane?’ said the raven, alighting on a stone. ‘You must make acquaintance with the horse that will carry you in the morning!’

He gave a strange whistle through his long black beak. A spot appeared on the face of the half-risen moon. To my ears came presently the drumming of swift, soft-galloping hoofs, and in a minute or two, out of the very disc of the moon, low-thundered the terrible horse. His mane flowed

away behind him like the crest of a wind-fighting wave, torn seaward in hoary spray, and the whisk of his tail kept blinding the eye of the moon. Nineteen hands he seemed, huge of bone, tight of skin, hard of muscle – a steed the holy Death himself might choose on which to ride abroad and slay! The moon seemed to regard him with awe; in her scary light he looked a very skeleton, loosely roped together. Terrifically large, he moved with the lightness of a winged insect. As he drew near, his speed slackened, and his mane and tail drifted about him settling.

Now I was not merely a lover of horses, but I loved every horse I saw. I had never spent money except upon horses, and had never sold a horse. The sight of this mighty one, terrible to look at, woke in me longing to possess him. It was pure greed, nay, rank covetousness, an evil thing in all the worlds. I do not mean that I could have stolen him, but that, regardless of his proper place, I would have bought him if I could. I laid my hands on him, and stroked the protuberant bones that humped a hide smooth and thin, and shiny as satin – so shiny that the very shape of the moon was reflected in it; I fondled his sharp-pointed ears, whispered words in them, and breathed into his red nostrils the breath of a man's life. He in return breathed into mine the breath of a horse's life, and we loved one another. What eyes he had! Blue-filmy like the eyes of the dead, behind each was a glowing coal! The raven, with wings half extended, looked on pleased at my love-making to his magnificent horse.

'That is well! be friends with him,' he said; 'he will carry you all the better to-morrow! – Now we must hurry home!'

My desire to ride the horse had grown passionate.

'May I not mount him at once, Mr Raven?' I cried.

'By all means!' he answered. 'Mount, and ride him home.'

The horse bent his head over my shoulder lovingly. I twisted my hands in his mane and scrambled on his back, not without aid from certain protuberant bones.

'He would outspeed any leopard in creation!' I cried.

'Not that way at night,' answered the raven; 'the road is difficult. – But come; loss now will be gain then! To wait is harder than to run, and its meed is the fuller. Go on, my son – straight to the cottage. I shall be there as soon as you. It will rejoice my wife's heart to see a son of hers on that horse!'

I sat silent. The horse stood like a block of marble.

‘Why do you linger?’ asked the raven.

‘I long so much to ride after the leopardess,’ I answered, ‘that I can scarce restrain myself!’

‘You have promised!’

‘My debt to the Little Ones appears, I confess, a greater thing than my bond to you.’

‘Yield to the temptation and you will bring mischief upon them – and on yourself also.’

‘What matters it for me? I love them; and love works no evil. I will go.’

But the truth was, I forgot the children, infatuate with the horse.

Eyes flashed through the darkness, and I knew that Adam stood in his own shape beside me. I knew also by his voice that he repressed an indignation almost too strong for him.

‘Mr Vane,’ he said, ‘do you not know why you have not yet done anything worth doing?’

‘Because I have been a fool,’ I answered.

‘Wherein?’

‘In everything.’

‘Which do you count your most indiscreet action?’

‘Bringing the princess to life: I ought to have left her to her just fate.’

‘Nay, now you talk foolishly! You could not have done otherwise then you did, not knowing she was evil! – But you never brought any one to life! How could you, yourself dead?’

‘I dead?’ I cried.

‘Yes,’ he answered; ‘and you will be dead, so long as you refuse to die.’

‘Back to the old riddling!’ I returned scornfully.

‘Be persuaded, and go home with me,’ he continued gently. ‘The most – nearly the only foolish thing you ever did, was to run from our dead.’

I pressed the horse’s ribs, and he was off like a sudden wind I gave him a pat on the side of the neck, and he went about in a sharp-driven curve, ‘close to the ground, like a cat when scratchingly she wheels about after a mouse,’ leaning sideways till his mane swept the tops of the heather.

Through the dark I heard the wings of the raven. Five quick flaps I heard, and he perched on the horse’s head. The horse checked himself instantly, ploughing up the ground with his feet.

‘Mr Vane,’ croaked the raven, ‘think what you are doing! Twice already has evil befallen you – once from fear, and once from heedlessness: breach of word is far worse; it is a crime.’

‘The Little Ones are in frightful peril, and I brought it upon them!’ I cried. ‘—But indeed I will not break my word to you. I will return, and spend in your house what nights – what days – what years you please.’

‘I tell you once more you will do them other than good if you go to-night,’ he insisted.

But a false sense of power, a sense which had no root and was merely vibrated into me from the strength of the horse, had, alas, rendered me too stupid to listen to anything he said!

‘Would you take from me my last chance of reparation?’ I cried. ‘This time there shall be no shirking! It is my duty, and I will go – if I perish for it!’

‘Go, then, foolish boy!’ he returned, with anger in his croak. ‘Take the horse, and ride to failure! May it be to humility!’

He spread his wings and flew. Again I pressed the lean ribs under me.

‘After the spotted leopardess!’ I whispered in his ear.

He turned his head this way and that, snuffing the air; then started, and went a few paces in a slow, undecided walk. Suddenly he quickened his walk; broke into a trot; began to gallop, and in a few moments his speed was tremendous. He seemed to see in the dark; never stumbled, not once faltered, not once hesitated. I sat as on the ridge of a wave. I felt under me the play of each individual muscle: his joints were so elastic, and his every movement glided so into the next, that not once did he jar me. His growing swiftness bore him along until he flew rather than ran. The wind met and passed us like a tornado.

Across the evil hollow we sped like a bolt from an arblast. No monster lifted its neck; all knew the hoofs that thundered over their heads! We rushed up the hills, we shot down their farther slopes; from the rocky chasms of the river-bed he did not swerve; he held on over them his fierce, terrible gallop. The moon, half-way up the heaven, gazed with a solemn trouble in her pale countenance. Rejoicing in the power of my steed and in the pride of my life, I sat like a king and rode.

We were near the middle of the many channels, my horse every other moment clearing one, sometimes two in his stride, and now and then

gathering himself for a great bounding leap, when the moon reached the key-stone of her arch. Then came a wonder and a terror: she began to descend rolling like the nave of Fortune's wheel bowled by the gods, and went faster and faster. Like our own moon, this one had a human face, and now the broad forehead now the chin was uppermost as she rolled. I gazed aghast.

Across the ravines came the howling of wolves. An ugly fear began to invade the hollow places of my heart; my confidence was on the wane! The horse maintained his headlong swiftness, with ears pricked forward, and thirsty nostrils exulting in the wind his career created. But there was the moon jolting like an old chariot-wheel down the hill of heaven, with awful boding! She rolled at last over the horizon-edge and disappeared, carrying all her light with her.

The mighty steed was in the act of clearing a wide shallow channel when we were caught in the net of the darkness. His head dropped; its impetus carried his helpless bulk across, but he fell in a heap on the margin, and where he fell he lay. I got up, kneeled beside him, and felt him all over. Not a bone could I find broken, but he was a horse no more. I sat down on the body, and buried my face in my hands.

CHAPTER 32

The Lovers and the Bags

Bitterly cold grew the night. The body froze under me. The cry of the wolves came nearer; I heard their feet soft-padding on the rocky ground; their quick panting filled the air. Through the darkness I saw the many glowing eyes; their half-circle contracted around me. My time was come! I sprang to my feet. – Alas, I had not even a stick!

They came in a rush, their eyes flashing with fury of greed, their black throats agape to devour me I stood hopelessly waiting them. One moment they halted over the horse – then came at me.

With a sound of swiftness all but silence, a cloud of green eyes came down on their flank. The heads that bore them flew at the wolves with a cry feebler yet fiercer than their howling snarl, and by the cry I knew them: they were cats, led by a huge gray one. I could see nothing of him but his eyes, yet I knew him – and so knew his colour and bigness. A terrific battle followed, whose tale alone came to me through the night. I would have fled, for surely it was but a fight which should have me! – only where was the use? my first step would be a fall! and my foes of either kind could both see and scent me in the dark!

All at once I missed the howling, and the caterwauling grew wilder. Then came the soft padding, and I knew it meant flight: the cats had defeated the wolves! In a moment the sharpest of sharp teeth were in my legs; a moment more and the cats were all over me in a live cataract, biting wherever they could bite, furiously scratching me anywhere and everywhere. A multitude clung to my body; I could not flee. Madly I fell on the hateful swarm, every

finger instinct with destruction. I tore them off me, I throttled at them in vain: when I would have flung them from me, they clung to my hands like limpets. I trampled them under my feet, thrust my fingers in their eyes, caught them in jaws stronger than theirs, but could not rid myself of one. Without cease they kept discovering upon me space for fresh mouthfuls; they hauled at my skin with the widespread, horribly curved pincers of clutching claws; they hissed and spat in my face – but never touched it until, in my despair, I threw myself on the ground, when they forsook my body, and darted at my face. I rose, and immediately they left it, the more to occupy themselves with my legs. In an agony I broke from them and ran, careless whither, cleaving the solid dark. They accompanied me in a surrounding torrent, now rubbing, now leaping up against me, but tormenting me no more. When I fell, which was often, they gave me time to rise; when from fear of falling I slackened my pace, they flew afresh at my legs. All that miserable night they kept me running – but they drove me by a comparatively smooth path, for I tumbled into no gully, and passing the Evil Wood without seeing it, left it behind in the dark. When at length the morning appeared, I was beyond the channels, and on the verge of the orchard valley. In my joy I would have made friends with my persecutors, but not a cat was to be seen. I threw myself on the moss, and fell fast asleep.

I was waked by a kick, to find myself bound hand and foot, once more the thrall of the giants!

‘What fitter?’ I said to myself; ‘to whom else should I belong?’ and I laughed in the triumph of self-disgust. A second kick stopped my false merriment; and thus recurrently assisted by my captors, I succeeded at length in rising to my feet.

Six of them were about me. They undid the rope that tied my legs together, attached a rope to each of them, and dragged me away. I walked as well as I could, but, as they frequently pulled both ropes at once, I fell repeatedly, whereupon they always kicked me up again. Straight to my old labour they took me, tied my leg-ropes to a tree, undid my arms, and put the hateful flint in my left hand. Then they lay down and pelted me with fallen fruit and stones, but seldom hit me. If I could have freed my legs, and got hold of a stick I spied a couple of yards from me, I would have fallen upon

all six of them! ‘But the Little Ones will come at night!’ I said to myself, and was comforted.

All day I worked hard. When the darkness came, they tied my hands, and left me fast to the tree. I slept a good deal, but woke often, and every time from a dream of lying in the heart of a heap of children. With the morning my enemies reappeared, bringing their kicks and their bestial company.

It was about noon, and I was nearly failing from fatigue and hunger, when I heard a sudden commotion in the brushwood, followed by a burst of the bell-like laughter so dear to my heart. I gave a loud cry of delight and welcome. Immediately rose a trumpeting as of baby-elephants, a neighing as of foals, and a bellowing as of calves, and through the bushes came a crowd of Little Ones, on diminutive horses, on small elephants, on little bears; but the noises came from the riders, not the animals. Mingled with the mounted ones walked the bigger of the boys and girls, among the latter a woman with a baby crowing in her arms. The giants sprang to their lumbering feet, but were instantly saluted with a storm of sharp stones; the horses charged their legs; the bears rose and hugged them at the waist; the elephants threw their trunks round their necks, pulled them down, and gave them such a trampling as they had sometimes given, but never received before. In a moment my ropes were undone, and I was in the arms, seemingly innumerable, of the Little Ones. For some time I saw no more of the giants.

They made me sit down, and my Lona came, and without a word began to feed me with the loveliest red and yellow fruits. I sat and ate, the whole colony mounting guard until I had done. Then they brought up two of the largest of their elephants, and having placed them side by side, hooked their trunks and tied their tails together. The docile creatures could have untied their tails with a single shake, and unhooked their trunks by forgetting them; but tails and trunks remained as their little masters had arranged them, and it was clear the elephants understood that they must keep their bodies parallel. I got up, and laid myself in the hollow between their two backs; when the wise animals, counteracting the weight that pushed them apart, leaned against each other, and made for me a most comfortable litter. My feet, it is true, projected beyond their tails, but my head lay pillowed on an ear of each. Then some of the smaller children, mounting for a bodyguard, ranged themselves in a row along the back of each of my

bearers; the whole assembly formed itself in train; and the procession began to move.

Whither they were carrying me, I did not try to conjecture, I yielded myself to their pleasure, almost as happy as they. Chattering and laughing and playing glad tricks innumerable at first, the moment they saw I was going to sleep, they became still as judges.

I woke: a sudden musical uproar greeted the opening of my eyes.

We were travelling through the forest in which they found the babies, and which, as I had suspected, stretched all the way from the valley to the hot stream.

A tiny girl sat with her little feet close to my face, and looked down at me coaxingly for a while, then spoke, the rest seeming to hang on her words.

'We make a petisson to king,' she said.

'What is it, my darling?' I asked.

'Sut eyes one minute,' she answered.

'Certainly I will! Here goes!' I replied, and shut my eyes close.

'No, no! not fore I tell oo!' she cried.

I opened them again, and we talked and laughed together for quite another hour.

'Close eyes!' she said suddenly.

I closed my eyes, and kept them close. The elephants stood still. I heard a soft scurry, a little rustle, and then a silence – for in that world *some* silences *are* heard.

'Open eyes!' twenty voices a little way off shouted at once; but when I obeyed, not a creature was visible except the elephants that bore me. I knew the children were marvellously quick in getting out of the way – the giants had taught them that; but when I raised myself, and looking about in the open shrubless forest, could descry neither hand nor heel, I stared in 'blank astonishment.'

The sun was set, and it was fast getting dark, yet presently a multitude of birds began to sing. I lay down to listen, pretty sure that, if I left them alone, the hiders would soon come out again.

The singing grew to a little storm of bird-voices. 'Surely the children must have something to do with it! – And yet how could they set the birds singing?' I said to myself as I lay and listened. Soon, however, happening to look up into the tree under which my elephants stood, I thought I spied a

little motion among the leaves, and looked more keenly. Sudden white spots appeared in the dark foliage, the music died down, a gale of childish laughter rippled the air, and white spots came out in every direction: the trees were full of children! In the wildest merriment they began to descend, some dropping from bough to bough so rapidly that I could scarce believe they had not fallen. I left my litter, and was instantly surrounded – a mark for all the artillery of their jubilant fun With stately composure the elephants walked away to bed.

'But,' said I, when their uproarious gladness had had scope for a while, 'how is it that I never before heard you sing like the birds? Even when I thought it must be you, I could hardly believe it!'

'Ah,' said one of the wildest, 'but we were not birds then! We were run-creatures, not fly-creatures! We had our hide-places in the bushes then; but when we came to no-bushes, only trees, we had to build nests! When we built nests, we grew birds, and when we were birds, we had to do birds! We asked them to teach us their noises, and they taught us, and now we are real birds! – Come and see my nest. It's not big enough for king, but it's big enough for king to see me in it!'

I told him I could not get up a tree without the sun to show me the way; when he came, I would try.

'Kings seldom have wings!' I added.

'King! king!' cried one, 'oo knows none of us hasn't no wings – foolis feddery tings! Arms and legs is better.'

'That is true. I can get up without wings – and carry straws in my mouth too, to build my nest with!'

'Oo knows!' he answered, and went away sucking his thumb.

A moment after, I heard him calling out of his nest, a great way up a walnut tree of enormous size.

'Up adain, king! Dood night! I seepy!'

And I heard no more of him till he woke me in the morning.

CHAPTER 33

Lona's Narrative

I lay down by a tree, and one and one or in little groups, the children left me and climbed to their nests. They were always so tired at night and so rested in the morning, that they were equally glad to go to sleep and to get up again. I, although tired also, lay awake: Lona had not bid me good night, and I was sure she would come.

I had been struck, the moment I saw her again, with her resemblance to the princess, and could not doubt her the daughter of whom Adam had told me; but in Lona the dazzling beauty of Lilith was softened by childlikeness, and deepened by the sense of motherhood. 'She is occupied probably,' I said to myself, 'with the child of the woman I met fleeing!' who, she had already told me, was not half mother enough.

She came at length, sat down beside me, and after a few moments of silent delight, expressed mainly by stroking my face and hands, began to tell me everything that had befallen since I went. The moon appeared as we talked, and now and then, through the leaves, lighted for a quivering moment her beautiful face – full of thought, and a care whose love redeemed and glorified it. How such a child should have been born of such a mother – such a woman of such a princess, was hard to understand; but then, happily, she had two parents – say rather, three! She drew my heart by what in me was likest herself, and I loved her as one who, grow to what perfection she might, could only become the more a child. I knew now that I loved her when I left her, and that the hope of seeing her again had been

my main comfort. Every word she spoke seemed to go straight to my heart, and, like the truth itself, make it purer.

She told me that after I left the orchard valley, the giants began to believe a little more in the actual existence of their neighbours, and became in consequence more hostile to them. Sometimes the Little Ones would see them trampling furiously, perceiving or imagining some indication of their presence, while they indeed stood beside, and laughed at their foolish rage. By and by, however, their animosity assumed a more practical shape: they began to destroy the trees on whose fruit the Little Ones lived. This drove the mother of them all to meditate counteraction. Setting the sharpest of them to listen at night, she learned that the giants thought I was hidden somewhere near, intending, as soon as I recovered my strength, to come in the dark and kill them sleeping. Thereupon she concluded that the only way to stop the destruction was to give them ground for believing that they had abandoned the place. The Little Ones must remove into the forest – beyond the range of the giants, but within reach of their own trees, which they must visit by night! The main objection to the plan was, that the forest had little or no undergrowth to shelter – or conceal them if necessary.

But she reflected that where birds, there the Little Ones could find habitation. They had eager sympathies with all modes of life, and could learn of the wildest creatures: why should they not take refuge from the cold and their enemies in the tree-tops? why not, having lain in the low brushwood, seek now the lofty foliage? why not build nests where it would not serve to scoop hollows? All that the birds could do, the Little Ones could learn – except, indeed, to fly!

She spoke to them on the subject, and they heard with approval. They could already climb the trees, and they had often watched the birds building their nests! The trees of the forest, although large, did not look bad! They went up much nearer the sky than those of the giants, and spread out their arms – some even stretched them down – as if inviting them to come and live with them! Perhaps, in the top of the tallest, they might find that bird that laid the baby-eggs, and sat upon them till they were ripe, then tumbled them down to let the little ones out! Yes, they would build sleep-houses in the trees, where no giant would see them, for never by any chance did one throw back his dull head to look up! Then the bad giants would be sure they

had left the country, and the Little Ones would gather their own apples and pears and figs and mesples and peaches when they were asleep!

Thus reasoned the Lovers, and eagerly adopted Lona's suggestion – with the result that they were soon as much at home in the tree-tops as the birds themselves, and that the giants came ere long to the conclusion that they had frightened them out of the country – whereupon they forgot their trees, and again almost ceased to believe in the existence of their small neighbours.

Lona asked me whether I had not observed that many of the children were grown. I answered I had not, but could readily believe it. She assured me it was so, but said the certain evidence that their minds too had grown since their migration upward, had gone far in mitigation of the alarm the discovery had occasioned her.

In the last of the short twilight, and later when the moon was shining, they went down to the valley, and gathered fruit enough to serve them the next day; for the giants never went out in the twilight: that to them was darkness; and they hated the moon: had they been able, they would have extinguished her. But soon the Little Ones found that fruit gathered in the night was not altogether good the next day; so the question arose whether it would not be better, instead of pretending to have left the country, to make the bad giants themselves leave it.

They had already, she said, in exploring the forest, made acquaintance with the animals in it, and with most of them personally. Knowing therefore how strong as well as wise and docile some of them were, and how swift as well as manageable many others, they now set themselves to secure their aid against the giants, and with loving, playful approaches, had soon made more than friends of most of them, from the first addressing horse or elephant as Brother or Sister Elephant, Brother or Sister Horse, until before long they had an individual name for each. It was some little time longer before they said Brother or Sister Bear, but that came next, and the other day she had heard one little fellow cry, 'Ah, Sister Serpent!' to a snake that bit him as he played with it too roughly. Most of them would have nothing to do with a caterpillar, except watch it through its changes; but when at length it came from its retirement with wings, all would immediately address it as Sister Butterfly, congratulating it on its metamorphosis – for

which they used a word that meant something like *repentance* – and evidently regarding it as something sacred.

One moonlit evening, as they were going to gather their fruit, they came upon a woman seated on the ground with a baby in her lap – the woman I had met on my way to Bulika. They took her for a giantess that had stolen one of their babies, for they regarded all babies as their property. Filled with anger they fell upon her multitudinously, beating her after a childish, yet sufficiently bewildering fashion. She would have fled, but a boy threw himself down and held her by the feet. Recovering her wits, she recognised in her assailants the children whose hospitality she sought, and at once yielded the baby. Lona appeared, and carried it away in her bosom.

But while the woman noted that in striking her they were careful not to hurt the child, the Little Ones noted that, as she surrendered her, she hugged and kissed her just as they wanted to do, and came to the conclusion that she must be a giantess of the same kind as the good giant. The moment Lona had the baby, therefore, they brought the mother fruit, and began to show her every sort of childish attention.

Now the woman had been in perplexity whither to betake herself, not daring to go back to the city, because the princess was certain to find out who had lamed her leopardess: delighted with the friendliness of the little people, she resolved to remain with them for the present: she would have no trouble with her infant, and might find some way of returning to her husband, who was rich in money and gems, and very seldom unkind to her.

Here I must supplement, partly from conjecture, what Lona told me about the woman. With the rest of the inhabitants of Bulika, she was aware of the tradition that the princess lived in terror of the birth of an infant destined to her destruction. They were all acquainted, however, with the frightful means by which she preserved her youth and beauty; and her deteriorating physical condition requiring a larger use of those means, they took the apparent increase of her hostility to children for a sign that she saw her doom approaching. This, although no one dreamed of any attempt against her, nourished in them hopes of change.

Now arose in the mind of the woman the idea of furthering the fulfilment of the shadowy prediction, or of using the myth at least for her own restoration to her husband. For what seemed more probable than that the fate foretold lay with these very children? They were marvellously brave,

and the Bulikans cowards, in abject terror of animals! If she could rouse in the Little Ones the ambition of taking the city, then in the confusion of the attack, she would escape from the little army, reach her house unrecognised, and there lying hidden, await the result!

Should the children now succeed in expelling the giants, she would begin at once, while they were yet flushed with victory, to suggest the loftier aim! By disposition, indeed, they were unfit for warfare; they hardly ever quarrelled, and never fought; loved every live thing, and hated either to hurt or to suffer. Still, they were easily influenced, and could certainly be taught any exercise within their strength! – At once she set some of the smaller ones throwing stones at a mark; and soon they were all engrossed with the new game, and growing skilful in it.

The first practical result was their use of stones in my rescue. While gathering fruit, they found me asleep, went home, held a council, came the next day with their elephants and horses, overwhelmed the few giants watching me, and carried me off. Jubilant over their victory, the smaller boys were childishly boastful, the bigger boys less ostentatious, while the girls, although their eyes flashed more, were not so talkative as usual. The woman of Bulika no doubt felt encouraged.

We talked the greater part of the night, chiefly about the growth of the children, and what it might indicate. With Lona's power of recognising truth I had long been familiar; now I began to be astonished at her practical wisdom. Probably, had I been more of a child myself, I should have wondered less.

It was yet far from morning when I became aware of a slight fluttering and scrambling. I rose on my elbow, and looking about me, saw many Little Ones descend from their nests. They disappeared, and in a few moments all was again still.

'What are they doing?' I asked.

'They think,' answered Lona, 'that, stupid as they are, the giants will search the wood, and they are gone to gather stones with which to receive them. Stones are not plentiful in the forest, and they have to scatter far to find enow. They will carry them to their nests, and from the trees attack the giants as they come within reach. Knowing their habits, they do not expect them before the morning. If they do come, it will be the opening of a war of expulsion: one or the other people must go. The result, however, is hardly

doubtful. We do not mean to kill them; indeed, their skulls are so thick that I do not think we could! – not that killing would do them much harm; they are so little alive! If one were killed, his giantess would not remember him beyond three days!'

'Do the children then throw so well that the thing *might* happen?' I asked.

'Wait till you see them!' she answered, with a touch of pride. '—But I have not yet told you,' she went on, 'of a strange thing that happened the night before last! – We had come home from gathering our fruit, and were asleep in our nests, when we were roused by the horrid noises of beasts fighting. The moon was bright, and in a moment our trees glittered with staring little eyes, watching two huge leopardesses, one perfectly white, the other covered with black spots, which worried and tore at each other with I do not know how many teeth and claws. To judge by her back, the spotted creature must have been climbing a tree when the other sprang upon her. When first I saw them, they were just under my own tree, rolling over and over each other. I got down on the lowest branch, and saw them perfectly. The children enjoyed the spectacle, siding some with this one, some with that, for we had never seen such beasts before, and thought they were only at play. But by degrees their roaring and growling almost ceased, and I saw that they were in deadly earnest, and heartily wished neither might be left able to climb a tree. But when the children saw the blood pouring from their flanks and throats, what do you think they did? They scurried down to comfort them, and gathering in a great crowd about the terrible creatures, began to pat and stroke them. Then I got down as well, for they were much too absorbed to heed my calling to them; but before I could reach them, the white one stopped fighting, and sprang among them with such a hideous yell that they flew up into the trees like birds. Before I got back into mine, the wicked beasts were at it again tooth and claw. Then Whitey had the best of it; Spotty ran away as fast as she could run, and Whitey came and lay down at the foot of my tree. But in a minute or two she was up again, and walking about as if she thought Spotty might be lurking somewhere. I waked often, and every time I looked out, I saw her. In the morning she went away.'

'I know both the beasts,' I said. 'Spotty is a bad beast. She hates the children, and would kill every one of them. But Whitey loves them. She ran

at them only to frighten them away, lest Spotty should get hold of any of them. No one needs be afraid of Whitey!'

By this time the Little Ones were coming back, and with much noise, for they had no care to keep quiet now that they were at open war with the giants, and laden with good stones. They mounted to their nests again, though with difficulty because of their burdens, and in a minute were fast asleep. Lona retired to her tree. I lay where I was, and slept the better that I thought most likely the white leopardess was still somewhere in the wood.

I woke soon after the sun, and lay pondering. Two hours passed, and then in truth the giants began to appear, in straggling companies of three and four, until I counted over a hundred of them. The children were still asleep, and to call them would draw the attention of the giants: I would keep quiet so long as they did not discover me. But by and by one came blundering upon me, stumbled, fell, and rose again. I thought he would pass heedless, but he began to search about. I sprang to my feet, and struck him in the middle of his huge body. The roar he gave roused the children, and a storm as of hail instantly came on, of which not a stone struck me, and not one missed the giant. He fell and lay. Others drew near, and the storm extended, each purblind creature becoming, as he entered the range of a garrisoned tree, a target for converging stones. In a short time almost every giant was prostrate, and a jubilant paean of bird-song rose from the tops of fifty trees

Many elephants came hurrying up, and the children descending the trees like monkeys, in a moment every elephant had three or four of them on his back, and thus loaded, began to walk over the giants, who lay and roared. Losing patience at length with their noise, the elephants gave them a few blows of their trunks, and left them.

Until night the bad giants remained where they had fallen, silent and motionless. The next morning they had disappeared every one, and the children saw no more of them. They removed to the other end of the orchard valley, and never after ventured into the forest.

CHAPTER 34

Preparation

Victory thus gained, the woman of Bulika began to speak about the city, and talked much of its defenceless condition, of the wickedness of its princess, of the cowardice of its inhabitants. In a few days the children chattered of nothing but Bulika, although indeed they had not the least notion of what a city was. Then first I became aware of the design of the woman, although not yet of its motive.

The idea of taking possession of the place, recommended itself greatly to Lona – and to me also. The children were now so rapidly developing faculty, that I could see no serious obstacle to the success of the enterprise. For the terrible Lilith – woman or leopardess, I knew her one vulnerable point, her doom through her daughter, and the influence the ancient prophecy had upon the citizens: surely whatever in the enterprise could be called risk, was worth taking! Successful, – and who could doubt their success? – must not the Little Ones, from a crowd of children, speedily become a youthful people, whose government and influence would be all for righteousness? Ruling the wicked with a rod of iron, would they not be the redemption of the nation?

At the same time, I have to confess that I was not without views of personal advantage, not without ambition in the undertaking. It was just, it seemed to me, that Lona should take her seat on the throne that had been her mother's, and natural that she should make of me her consort and minister. For me, I would spend my life in her service; and between us,

what might we not do, with such a core to it as the Little Ones, for the development of a noble state?

I confess also to an altogether foolish dream of opening a commerce in gems between the two worlds – happily impossible, for it could have done nothing but harm to both.

Calling to mind the appeal of Adam, I suggested to Lona that to find them water might perhaps expedite the growth of the Little Ones. She judged it prudent, however, to leave that alone for the present, as we did not know what its first consequences might be; while, in the course of time, it would almost certainly subject them to a new necessity.

'They are what they are without it!' she said: 'when we have the city, we will search for water!'

We began, therefore, and pushed forward our preparations, constantly reviewing the merry troops and companies. Lona gave her attention chiefly to the commissariat, while I drilled the little soldiers, exercised them in stone-throwing, taught them the use of some other weapons, and did all I could to make warriors of them. The main difficulty was to get them to rally to their flag the instant the call was sounded. Most of them were armed with slings, some of the bigger boys with bows and arrows. The bigger girls carried aloe-spikes, strong as steel and sharp as needles, fitted to longish shafts – rather formidable weapons. Their sole duty was the charge of such as were too small to fight.

Lona had herself grown a good deal, but did not seem aware of it: she had always been, as she still was, the tallest! Her hair was much longer, and she was become almost a woman, but not one beauty of childhood had she outgrown. When first we met after our long separation, she laid down her infant, put her arms round my neck, and clung to me silent, her face glowing with gladness: the child whimpered; she sprang to him, and had him in her bosom instantly. To see her with any thoughtless, obstinate, or irritable little one, was to think of a tender grandmother. I seemed to have known her for ages – for always – from before time began! I hardly remembered my mother, but in my mind's eye she now looked like Lona; and if I imagined sister or child, invariably she had the face of Lona! My every imagination flew to her; she was my heart's wife! She hardly ever sought me, but was almost always within sound of my voice. What I did or thought, I referred constantly to her, and rejoiced to believe that, while

doing her work in absolute independence, she was most at home by my side. Never for me did she neglect the smallest child, and my love only quickened my sense of duty. To love her and to do my duty, seemed, not indeed one, but inseparable. She might suggest something I should do; she might ask me what she ought to do; but she never seemed to suppose that I, any more than she, would like to do, or could care about anything except what must be done. Her love overflowed upon me – not in caresses, but in a closeness of recognition which I can compare to nothing but the devotion of a divine animal.

I never told her anything about her mother.

The wood was full of birds, the splendour of whose plumage, while it took nothing from their song, seemed almost to make up for the lack of flowers – which, apparently, could not grow without water. Their glorious feathers being everywhere about in the forest, it came into my heart to make from them a garment for Lona. While I gathered, and bound them in overlapping rows, she watched me with evident appreciation of my choice and arrangement, never asking what I was fashioning, but evidently waiting expectant the result of my work. In a week or two it was finished – a long loose mantle, to fasten at the throat and waist, with openings for the arms.

I rose and put it on her. She rose, took it off, and laid it at my feet – I imagine from a sense of propriety. I put it again on her shoulders, and showed her where to put her arms through She smiled, looked at the feathers a little and stroked them – again took it off and laid it down, this time by her side. When she left me, she carried it with her, and I saw no more of it for some days. At length she came to me one morning wearing it, and carrying another garment which she had fashioned similarly, but of the dried leaves of a tough evergreen. It had the strength almost of leather, and the appearance of scale-armour. I put it on at once, and we always thereafter wore those garments when on horseback.

For, on the outskirts of the forest, had appeared one day a troop of full-grown horses, with which, as they were nowise alarmed at creatures of a shape so different from their own, I had soon made friends, and two of the finest I had trained for Lona and myself. Already accustomed to ride a small one, her delight was great when first she looked down from the back of an animal of the giant kind; and the horse showed himself proud of the burden he bore. We exercised them every day until they had such confidence in us

as to obey instantly and fear nothing; after which we always rode them at parade and on the march.

The undertaking did indeed at times appear to me a foolhardy one, but the confidence of the woman of Bulika, real or simulated, always overcame my hesitancy. The princess's magic, she insisted, would prove powerless against the children; and as to any force she might muster, our animal-allies alone would assure our superiority: she was herself, she said, ready, with a good stick, to encounter any two men of Bulika. She confessed to not a little fear of the leopardess, but I was myself ready for her. I shrank, however, from carrying *all* the children with us.

'Would it not be better,' I said, 'that you remained in the forest with your baby and the smallest of the Little Ones?'

She answered that she greatly relied on the impression the sight of them would make on the women, especially the mothers.

'When they see the darlings,' she said, 'their hearts will be taken by storm; and I must be there encouraging them to make a stand! If there be a remnant of hardihood in the place, it will be found among the women!'

'You must not encumber yourself,' I said to Lona, 'with any of the children; you will be wanted everywhere!'

For there were two babies besides the woman's, and even on horseback she had almost always one in her arms.

'I do not remember ever being without a child to take care of,' she answered; 'but when we reach the city, it shall be as you wish!'

Her confidence in one who had failed so unworthily, shamed me. But neither had I initiated the movement, nor had I any ground for opposing it; I had no choice, but must give it the best help I could! For myself, I was ready to live or die with Lona. Her humility as well as her trust humbled me, and I gave myself heartily to her purposes.

Our way lying across a grassy plain, there was no need to take food for the horses, or the two cows which would accompany us for the infants; but the elephants had to be provided for. True, the grass was as good for them as for those other animals, but it was short, and with their one-fingered long noses, they could not pick enough for a single meal. We had, therefore, set the whole colony to gather grass and make hay, of which the elephants themselves could carry a quantity sufficient to last them several days, with the supplement of what we would gather fresh every time we halted. For the

bears we stored nuts, and for ourselves dried plenty of fruits. We had caught and tamed several more of the big horses, and now having loaded them and the elephants with these provisions, we were prepared to set out.

Then Lona and I held a general review, and I made them a little speech. I began by telling them that I had learned a good deal about them, and knew now where they came from.

'We did not come from anywhere,' they cried, interrupting me; 'we are here!'

I told them that every one of them had a mother of his own, like the mother of the last baby; that I believed they had all been brought from Bulika when they were so small that they could not now remember it; that the wicked princess there was so afraid of babies, and so determined to destroy them, that their mothers had to carry them away and leave them where she could not find them; and that now we were going to Bulika, to find their mothers, and deliver them from the bad giantess.

'But I must tell you,' I continued, 'that there is danger before us, for, as you know, we may have to fight hard to take the city.'

'We can fight! we are ready!' cried the boys.

'Yes, you can,' I returned, 'and I know you will: mothers are worth fighting for! Only mind, you must all keep together.'

'Yes, yes; we'll take care of each other,' they answered. 'Nobody shall touch one of us but his own mother!'

'You must mind, every one, to do immediately what your officers tell you!'

'We will, we will! – Now we're quite ready! Let us go!'

'Another thing you must not forget,' I went on: 'when you strike, be sure you make it a downright swinging blow; when you shoot an arrow, draw it to the head; when you sling a stone, sling it strong and straight.'

'That we will!' they cried with jubilant, fearless shout.

'Perhaps you will be hurt!'

'We don't mind that! – Do we, boys?'

'Not a bit!'

'Some of you may possibly be killed!' I said.

'*I* don't mind being killed!' cried one of the finest of the smaller boys: he rode a beautiful little bull, which galloped and jumped like a horse.

'I don't either! I don't either!' came from all sides.

Then Lona, queen and mother and sister of them all, spoke from her big horse by my side:

‘I would give my life,’ she said, ‘to have my mother! She might kill me if she liked! I should just kiss her and die!’

‘Come along, boys!’ cried a girl. ‘We’re going to our mothers!’

A pang went through my heart. – But I could not draw back; it would be moral ruin to the Little Ones!

CHAPTER 35

The Little Ones in Bulika

It was early in the morning when we set out, making, between the blue sky and the green grass, a gallant show on the wide plain. We would travel all the morning, and rest the afternoon; then go on at night, rest the next day, and start again in the short twilight. The latter part of our journey we would endeavour so to divide as to arrive at the city with the first of the morning, and be already inside the gates when discovered.

It seemed as if all the inhabitants of the forest would migrate with us. A multitude of birds flew in front, imagining themselves, no doubt, the leading division; great companies of butterflies and other insects played about our heads; and a crowd of four-footed creatures followed us. These last, when night came, left us almost all; but the birds and the butterflies, the wasps and the dragon-flies, went with us to the very gates of the city.

We halted and slept soundly through the afternoon: it was our first real march, but none were tired. In the night we went faster, because it was cold. Many fell asleep on the backs of their beasts, and woke in the morning quite fresh. None tumbled off. Some rode shaggy, shambling bears, which yet made speed enough, going as fast as the elephants. Others were mounted on different kinds of deer, and would have been racing all the way had I not prevented it. Those atop of the hay on the elephants, unable to see the animals below them, would keep talking to them as long as they were awake. Once, when we had halted to feed, I heard a little fellow, as he drew out the hay to give him, commune thus with his ‘darling beast’:

‘Nosy dear, I am digging you out of the mountain, and shall soon get down to you: be patient; I’m a coming! Very soon now you’ll send up your nose to look for me, and then we’ll kiss like good elephants, we will!’

The same night there burst out such a tumult of elephant-trumpeting, horse-neighing, and child-imitation, ringing far over the silent levels, that, uncertain how near the city might not be, I quickly stilled the uproar lest it should give warning of our approach.

Suddenly, one morning, the sun and the city rose, as it seemed, together. To the children the walls appeared only a great mass of rock, but when I told them the inside was full of nests of stone, I saw apprehension and dislike at once invade their hearts: for the first time in their lives, I believe – many of them long little lives – they knew fear. The place looked to them bad: how were they to find mothers in such a place? But they went on bravely, for they had confidence in Lona – and in me too, little as I deserved it.

We rode through the sounding archway. Surely never had such a drumming of hoofs, such a padding of paws and feet been heard on its old pavement! The horses started and looked scared at the echo of their own steps; some halted a moment, some plunged wildly and wheeled about; but they were soon quieted, and went on. Some of the Little Ones shivered, and all were still as death. The three girls held closer the infants they carried. All except the bears and butterflies manifested fear.

On the countenance of the woman lay a dark anxiety; nor was I myself unaffected by the general dread, for the whole army was on my hands and on my conscience: I had brought it up to the danger whose shadow was now making itself felt! But I was supported by the thought of the coming kingdom of the Little Ones, with the bad giants its slaves, and the animals its loving, obedient friends! Alas, I who dreamed thus, had not myself learned to obey! Untrusting, unfaithful obstinacy had set me at the head of that army of innocents! I was myself but a slave, like any king in the world I had left who does or would do only what pleases him! But Lona rode beside me a child indeed, therefore a free woman – calm, silent, watchful, not a whit afraid!

We were nearly in the heart of the city before any of its inhabitants became aware of our presence. But now windows began to open, and sleepy heads to look out. Every face wore at first a dull stare of wonderless

astonishment, which, as soon as the starers perceived the animals, changed to one of consternation. In spite of their fear, however, when they saw that their invaders were almost all children, the women came running into the streets, and the men followed. But for a time all of them kept close to the houses, leaving open the middle of the way, for they durst not approach the animals.

At length a boy, who looked about five years old, and was full of the idea of his mother, spying in the crowd a woman whose face attracted him, threw himself upon her from his antelope, and clung about her neck; nor was she slow to return his embrace and kisses. But the hand of a man came over her shoulder, and seized him by the neck. Instantly a girl ran her sharp spear into the fellow's arm. He sent forth a savage howl, and immediately stabbed by two or three more, fled yelling.

'They are just bad giants!' said Lona, her eyes flashing as she drove her horse against one of unusual height who, having stirred up the little manhood in him, stood barring her way with a club. He dared not abide the shock, but slunk aside, and the next moment went down, struck by several stones. Another huge fellow, avoiding my charger, stepped suddenly, with a speech whose rudeness alone was intelligible, between me and the boy who rode behind me. The boy told him to address the king; the giant struck his little horse on the head with a hammer, and he fell. Before the brute could strike again, however, one of the elephants behind laid him prostrate, and trampled on him so that he did not attempt to get up until hundreds of feet had walked over him, and the army was gone by.

But at sight of the women what a dismay clouded the face of Lona! Hardly one of them was even pleasant to look upon! Were her darlings to find mothers among such as these?

Hardly had we halted in the central square, when two girls rode up in anxious haste, with the tidings that two of the boys had been hurried away by some women. We turned at once, and then first discovered that the woman we befriended had disappeared with her baby.

But at the same moment we descried a white leopardess come bounding toward us down a narrow lane that led from the square to the palace. The Little Ones had not forgotten the fight of the two leopardesses in the forest: some of them looked terrified, and their ranks began to waver; but they remembered the order I had just given them, and stood fast.

We stopped to see the result; when suddenly a small boy, called Odu, remarkable for his speed and courage, who had heard me speak of the goodness of the white leopardess, leaped from the back of his bear, which went shambling after him, and ran to meet her. The leopardess, to avoid knocking him down, pulled herself up so suddenly that she went rolling over and over: when she recovered her feet she found the child on her back. Who could doubt the subjugation of a people which saw an urchin of the enemy bestride an animal of which they lived in daily terror? Confident of the effect on the whole army, we rode on.

As we stopped at the house to which our guides led us, we heard a scream; I sprang down, and thundered at the door; My horse came and pushed me away with his nose, turned about, and had begun to batter the door with his heels, when up came little Odu on the leopardess, and at sight of her he stood still, trembling. But she too had heard the cry, and forgetting the child on her back, threw herself at the door. The boy was dashed against it, and fell senseless. Before I could reach him, Lona had him in her arms, and as soon as he came to himself, set him on the back of his bear, which had still followed him.

When the leopardess threw herself the third time against the door, it gave way, and she darted in. We followed, but she had already vanished. We sprang up a stair, and went all over the house, to find no one. Darting down again, we spied a door under the stair, and got into a labyrinth of excavations. We had not gone far, however, when we met the leopardess with the child we sought across her back.

He told us that the woman he took for his mother threw him into a hole, saying she would give him to the leopardess. But the leopardess was a good one, and took him out.

Following in search of the other boy, we got into the next house more easily, but to find, alas, that we were too late: one of the savages had just killed the little captive! It consoled Lona, however, to learn which he was, for she had been expecting him to grow a bad giant, from which worst of fates death had saved him. The leopardess sprang upon his murderer, took him by the throat, dragged him into the street, and followed Lona with him, like a cat with a great rat in her jaws.

‘Let us leave the horrible place,’ said Lona; ‘There are no mothers here! This people is not worth delivering.’

The leopardess dropped her burden, and charged into the crowd, this way and that, wherever it was thickest. The slaves cried out and ran, tumbling over each other in heaps.

When we got back to the army, we found it as we had left it, standing in order and ready.

But I was far from easy: the princess gave no sign, and what she might be plotting we did not know! Watch and ward must be kept the night through!

The Little Ones were such hardy creatures that they could repose anywhere: we told them to lie down with their animals where they were, and sleep till they were called. In one moment they were down, and in another lapt in the music of their sleep, a sound as of water over grass, or a soft wind among leaves. Their animals slept more lightly, ever on the edge of waking. The bigger boys and girls walked softly hither and thither among the dreaming multitude. All was still; the whole wicked place appeared at rest.

CHAPTER 36

Mother and Daughter

Lona was so disgusted with the people, and especially with the women, that she wished to abandon the place as soon as possible; I, on the contrary, felt very strongly that to do so would be to fail wilfully where success was possible; and, far worse, to weaken the hearts of the Little Ones, and so bring them into much greater danger. If we retreated, it was certain the princess would not leave us unassailed! if we encountered her, the hope of the prophecy went with us! Mother and daughter must meet: it might be that Lona's loveliness would take Lilith's heart by storm! if she threatened violence, I should be there between them! If I found that I had no other power over her, I was ready, for the sake of my Lona, to strike her pitilessly on the closed hand! I knew she was doomed: most likely it was decreed that her doom should now be brought to pass through us!

Still without hint of the relation in which she stood to the princess, I stated the case to Lona as it appeared to me. At once she agreed to accompany me to the palace.

From the top of one of its great towers, the princess had, in the early morning, while the city yet slept, descried the approach of the army of the Little Ones. The sight awoke in her an over-mastering terror: she had failed in her endeavour to destroy them, and they were upon her! The prophecy was about to be fulfilled!

When she came to herself, she descended to the black hall, and seated herself in the north focus of the ellipse, under the opening in the roof.

For she must think! Now what she called *thinking* required a clear consciousness of herself, not as she was, but as she chose to believe herself; and to aid her in the realisation of this consciousness, she had suspended, a little way from and above her, itself invisible in the darkness of the hall, a mirror to receive the full sunlight reflected from her person. For the resulting vision of herself in the splendour of her beauty, she sat waiting the meridional sun.

Many a shadow moved about her in the darkness, but as often as, with a certain inner eye which she had, she caught sight of one, she refused to regard it. Close under the mirror stood the Shadow which attended her walks, but, self-occupied, him she did not see.

The city was taken; the inhabitants were cowering in terror; the Little Ones and their strange cavalry were encamped in the square; the sun shone upon the princess, and for a few minutes she saw herself glorious. The vision passed, but she sat on. The night was now come, and darkness clothed and filled the glass, yet she did not move. A gloom that swarmed with shadows, wallowed in the palace; the servants shivered and shook, but dared not leave it because of the beasts of the Little Ones; all night long the princess sat motionless: she must see her beauty again! she must try again to think! But courage and will had grown weary of her, and would dwell with her no more!

In the morning we chose twelve of the tallest and bravest of the boys to go with us to the palace. We rode our great horses, and they small horses and elephants.

The princess sat waiting the sun to give her the joy of her own presence. The tide of the light was creeping up the shore of the sky, but until the sun stood overhead, not a ray could enter the black hall.

He rose to our eyes, and swiftly ascended. As we climbed the steep way to the palace, he climbed the dome of its great hall. He looked in at the eye of it – and with sudden radiance the princess flashed upon her own sight. But she sprang to her feet with a cry of despair: alas her whiteness! the spot covered half her side, and was black as the marble around her! She clutched her robe, and fell back in her chair. The Shadow glided out, and she saw him go.

We found the gate open as usual, passed through the paved grove up to the palace door, and entered the vestibule. There in her cage lay the spotted

leopardess, apparently asleep or lifeless. The Little Ones paused a moment to look at her. She leaped up rampant against the cage. The horses reared and plunged; the elephants retreated a step. The next instant she fell supine, writhed in quivering spasms, and lay motionless. We rode into the great hall.

The princess yet leaned back in her chair in the shaft of sunlight, when from the stones of the court came to her ears the noise of the horses' hoofs. She started, listened, and shook: never had such sound been heard in her palace! She pressed her hand to her side, and gasped. The trampling came nearer and nearer; it entered the hall itself; moving figures that were not shadows approached her through the darkness!

For us, we saw a splendour, a glorious woman centring the dark. Lona sprang from her horse, and bounded to her. I sprang from mine, and followed Lona.

'Mother! mother!' she cried, and her clear, lovely voice echoed in the dome.

The princess shivered; her face grew almost black with hate; her eyebrows met on her forehead. She rose to her feet, and stood.

'Mother! mother!' cried Lona again, as she leaped on the daïs, and flung her arms around the princess.

An instant more and I should have reached them! – in that instant I saw Lona lifted high, and dashed on the marble floor. Oh, the horrible sound of her fall! At my feet she fell, and lay still. The princess sat down with the smile of a demoness.

I dropped on my knees beside Lona, raised her from the stones, and pressed her to my bosom. With indignant hate I glanced at the princess; she answered me with her sweetest smile. I would have sprung upon her, taken her by the throat, and strangled her, but love of the child was stronger than hate of the mother, and I clasped closer my precious burden. Her arms hung helpless; her blood trickled over my hands, and fell on the floor with soft, slow little plashes.

The horses scented it – mine first, then the small ones. Mine reared, shivering and wild-eyed, went about, and thundered blindly down the dark hall, with the little horses after him. Lona's stood gazing down at his mistress, and trembling all over. The boys flung themselves from their horses' backs, and they, not seeing the black wall before them, dashed

themselves, with mine, to pieces against it. The elephants came on to the foot of the daïs and stopped, wildly trumpeting; the Little Ones sprang upon it, and stood horrified; the princess lay back in her seat, her face that of a corpse, her eyes alone alive, wickedly flaming. She was again withered and wasted to what I found in the wood, and her side was as if a great branding hand had been laid upon it. But Lona saw nothing, and I saw but Lona.

'Mother! mother!' she sighed, and her breathing ceased.

I carried her into the court: the sun shone upon a white face, and the pitiful shadow of a ghostly smile. Her head hung back. She was 'dead as earth.'

I forgot the Little Ones, forgot the murdering princess, forgot the body in my arms, and wandered away, looking for my Lona. The doors and windows were crowded with brute-faces jeering at me, but not daring to speak, for they saw the white leopardess behind me, hanging her head close at my heel. I spurned her with my foot. She held back a moment, and followed me again.

I reached the square: the little army was gone! Its emptiness roused me. Where were the Little Ones, *her* Little Ones? I had lost her children! I stared helpless about me, staggered to the pillar, and sank upon its base.

But as I sat gazing on the still countenance, it seemed to smile a live momentary smile. I never doubted it an illusion, yet believed what it said: I should yet see her alive! It was not she, it was I who was lost, and she would find me!

I rose to go after the Little Ones, and instinctively sought the gate by which we had entered. I looked around me, but saw nothing of the leopardess.

The street was rapidly filling with a fierce crowd. They saw me encumbered with my dead, but for a time dared not assail me. Ere I reached the gate, however, they had gathered courage. The women began to hustle me; I held on heedless. A man pushed against my sacred burden: with a kick I sent him away howling. But the crowd pressed upon me, and fearing for the dead that was beyond hurt, I clasped my treasure closer, and freed my right arm. That instant, however, a commotion arose in the street behind me; the crowd broke, and through it came the Little Ones I had left in the palace. Ten of them were upon four of the elephants; on the two other elephants lay the princess, bound hand and foot, and quite still, save that her

eyes rolled in their ghastly sockets. The two other Little Ones rode behind her on Lona's horse. Every now and then the wise creatures that bore her threw their trunks behind and felt her cords.

I walked on in front, and out of the city. What an end to the hopes with which I entered the evil place! We had captured the bad princess, and lost our all-beloved queen! My life was bare! my heart was empty!

CHAPTER 37

The Shadow

A murmur of pleasure from my companions roused me: they had caught sight of their fellows in the distance! The two on Lona's horse rode on to join them. They were greeted with a wavering shout – which immediately died away. As we drew near, the sound of their sobs reached us like the breaking of tiny billows.

When I came among them, I saw that something dire had befallen them: on their childish faces was the haggard look left by some strange terror. No possible grief could have wrought the change. A few of them came slowly round me, and held out their arms to take my burden. I yielded it; the tender hopelessness of the smile with which they received it, made my heart swell with pity in the midst of its own desolation. In vain were their sobs over their mother-queen; in vain they sought to entice from her some recognition of their love; in vain they kissed and fondled her as they bore her away: she would not wake! On each side one carried an arm, gently stroking it, as many as could get near, put their arms under her body; those who could not, crowded around the bearers. On a spot where the grass grew thicker and softer they laid her down, and there all the Little Ones gathered sobbing.

Outside the crowd stood the elephants, and I near them, gazing at my Lona over the many little heads between. Those next me caught sight of the princess, and stared trembling. Odu was the first to speak.

'I have seen that woman before!' he whispered to his next neighbour. 'It was she who fought the white leopardess, the night they woke us with their yelling!'

‘Silly!’ returned his companion ‘That was a wild beast, with spots!’

‘Look at her eyes!’ insisted Odu ‘I know she is a bad giantess, but she is a wild beast all the same. I know she is the spotted one!’

The other took a step nearer; Odu drew him back with a sharp pull.

‘Don’t look at her!’ he cried, shrinking away, yet fascinated by the hate-filled longing in her eyes ‘She would eat you up in a moment! It was *her* shadow! She is the wicked princess!’

‘That cannot be! they said she was beautiful!’

‘Indeed it is the princess!’ I interposed ‘Wickedness has made her ugly!’

She heard, and what a look was hers!

‘It was very wrong of me to run away!’ said Odu thoughtfully.

‘What made you run away!’ I asked ‘I expected to find you where I left you!’

He did not reply at once.

‘I don’t know what made me run,’ answered another ‘I was frightened!’

‘It was a man that came down the hill from the palace,’ said a third.

‘How did he frighten you?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘He wasn’t a man,’ said Odu; ‘he was a shadow; he had no thick to him!’

‘Tell me more about him.’

‘He came down the hill very black, walking like a bad giant, but spread flat. He was nothing but blackness. We were frightened the moment we saw him, but we did not run away; we stood and watched him. He came on as if he would walk over us. But before he reached us, he began to spread and spread, and grew bigger and bigger, till at last he was so big that he went out of our sight, and we saw him no more, and then he was upon us!’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘He was all black through between us, and we could not see one another; and then he was inside us.’

‘How did you know he was inside you?’

‘He did me quite different. I felt like bad. I was not Odu any more – not the Odu I knew. I wanted to tear Sozo to pieces – not really, but like!’

He turned and hugged Sozo.

‘It wasn’t me, Sozo,’ he sobbed. ‘Really, deep down, it was Odu, loving you always! And Odu came up, and knocked Naughty away. I grew sick, and thought I must kill myself to get out of the black. Then came a horrible

laugh that had heard my think, and it set the air trembling about me. And then I suppose I ran away, but I did not know I had run away until I found myself running, fast as I could, and all the rest running too. I would have stopped, but I never thought of it until I was out of the gate among the grass. Then I knew that I had run away from a shadow that wanted to be me and wasn't, and that I was the Odu that loved Sozo. It was the shadow that got into me, and hated him from inside me, it was not my own self me! And now I know that I ought not to have run away! But indeed I did not quite know what I was doing until it was done! My legs did it, I think: they grew frightened, and forgot me, and ran away! Naughty legs! There! and there!'

Thus ended Odu, with a kick to each of his naughty legs.

'What became of the shadow?' I asked.

'I do not know,' he answered. 'I suppose he went home into the night where there is no moon.'

I fell a wondering where Lona was gone, and dropping on the grass, took the dead thing in my lap, and whispered in its ear, 'Where are you, Lona? I love you!' But its lips gave no answer. I kissed them, not quite cold, laid the body down again, and appointing a guard over it, rose to provide for the safety of Lona's people during the night.

Before the sun went down, I had set a watch over the princess outside the camp, and sentinels round it: intending to walk about it myself all night long, I told the rest of the army to go to sleep. They threw themselves on the grass and were asleep in a moment.

When the moon rose I caught a glimpse of something white; it was the leopardess. She swept silently round the sleeping camp, and I saw her pass three times between the princess and the Little Ones. Thereupon I made the watch lie down with the others, and stretched myself beside the body of Lona.

CHAPTER 38

To The House of Bitterness

In the morning we set out, and made for the forest as fast as we could. I rode Lona's horse, and carried her body. I would take it to her father: he would give it a couch in the chamber of his dead! or, if he would not, seeing she had not come of herself, I would watch it in the desert until it mouldered away! But I believed he would, for surely she died long ago! Alas, how bitterly must I now humble myself before him!

To Adam I must take Lilith also. I had no power to make her repent! I had hardly a right to slay her – much less a right to let her loose in the world! and surely I scarce merited being made for ever her gaoler!

Again and again, on the way, I offered her food; but she answered only with a look of hungering hate. Her fiery eyes kept rolling to and fro, nor ever closed, I believe, until we reached the other side of the hot stream. After that they never opened until we came to the House of Bitterness.

One evening, as we were camping for the night, I saw a little girl go up to her, and ran to prevent mischief. But ere I could reach them, the child had put something to the lips of the princess, and given a scream of pain.

'Please, king,' she whimpered, 'suck finger. Bad giantess make hole in it!'

I sucked the tiny finger.

'Well now!' she cried, and a minute after was holding a second fruit to a mouth greedy of other fare. But this time she snatched her hand quickly away, and the fruit fell to the ground. The child's name was Luva.

The next day we crossed the hot stream. Again on their own ground, the Little Ones were jubilant. But their nests were still at a great distance, and that day we went no farther than the ivy-hall, where, because of its grapes, I had resolved to spend the night. When they saw the great clusters, at once they knew them good, rushed upon them, ate eagerly, and in a few minutes were all fast asleep on the green floor and in the forest around the hall. Hoping again to see the dance, and expecting the Little Ones to sleep through it, I had made them leave a wide space in the middle. I lay down among them, with Lona by my side, but did not sleep.

The night came, and suddenly the company was there. I was wondering with myself whether, night after night, they would thus go on dancing to all eternity, and whether I should not one day have to join them because of my stiff-neckedness, when the eyes of the children came open, and they sprang to their feet, wide awake. Immediately every one caught hold of a dancer, and away they went, bounding and skipping. The spectres seemed to see and welcome them: perhaps they knew all about the Little Ones, for they had themselves long been on their way back to childhood! Anyhow, their innocent gambols must, I thought, bring refreshment to weary souls who, their present taken from them and their future dark, had no life save the shadow of their vanished past. Many a merry but never a rude prank did the children play; and if they did at times cause a momentary jar in the rhythm of the dance, the poor spectres, who had nothing to smile withal, at least manifested no annoyance

Just ere the morning began to break, I started to see the skeleton-princess in the doorway, her eyes open and glowing, the fearful spot black on her side. She stood for a moment, then came gliding in, as if she would join the dance. I sprang to my feet. A cry of repugnant fear broke from the children, and the lights vanished. But the low moon looked in, and I saw them clinging to each other. The ghosts were gone – at least they were no longer visible. The princess too had disappeared. I darted to the spot where I had left her: she lay with her eyes closed, as if she had never moved. I returned to the hall. The Little Ones were already on the floor, composing themselves to sleep.

The next morning, as we started, we spied, a little way from us, two skeletons moving about in a thicket. The Little Ones broke their ranks, and ran to them. I followed; and, although now walking at ease, without splint

or ligature, I was able to recognise the pair I had before seen in that neighbourhood. The children at once made friends with them, laying hold of their arms, and stroking the bones of their long fingers; and it was plain the poor creatures took their attentions kindly. The two seemed on excellent terms with each other. Their common deprivation had drawn them together! the loss of everything had been the beginning of a new life to them!

Perceiving that they had gathered handfuls of herbs, and were looking for more – presumably to rub their bones with, for in what other way could nourishment reach their system so rudimentary? – the Little Ones, having keenly examined those they held, gathered of the same sorts, and filled the hands the skeletons held out to receive them. Then they bid them goodbye, promising to come and see them again, and resumed their journey, saying to each other they had not known there were such nice people living in the same forest.

When we came to the nest-village, I remained there a night with them, to see them resettled; for Lona still looked like one just dead, and there seemed no need of haste.

The princess had eaten nothing, and her eyes remained shut: fearing she might die ere we reached the end of our journey, I went to her in the night, and laid my bare arm upon her lips. She bit into it so fiercely that I cried out. How I got away from her I do not know, but I came to myself lying beyond her reach. It was then morning, and immediately I set about our departure.

Choosing twelve Little Ones, not of the biggest and strongest, but of the sweetest and merriest, I mounted them on six elephants, and took two more of the wise *clumsies*, as the children called them, to bear the princess. I still rode Lona's horse, and carried her body wrapt in her cloak before me. As nearly as I could judge I took the direct way, across the left branch of the river-bed, to the House of Bitterness, where I hoped to learn how best to cross the broader and rougher branch, and how to avoid the basin of monsters: I dreaded the former for the elephants, the latter for the children.

I had one terrible night on the way – the third, passed in the desert between the two branches of the dead river.

We had stopped the elephants in a sheltered place, and there let the princess slip down between them, to lie on the sand until the morning. She seemed quite dead, but I did not think she was. I laid myself a little way

from her, with the body of Lona by my other side, thus to keep watch at once over the dead and the dangerous. The moon was halfway down the west, a pale, thoughtful moon, mottling the desert with shadows. Of a sudden she was eclipsed, remaining visible, but sending forth no light: a thick, diaphanous film covered her patient beauty, and she looked troubled. The film swept a little aside, and I saw the edge of it against her clearness – the jagged outline of a bat-like wing, torn and hooked. Came a cold wind with a burning sting – and Lilith was upon me. Her hands were still bound, but with her teeth she pulled from my shoulder the cloak Lona made for me, and fixed them in my flesh. I lay as one paralysed.

Already the very life seemed flowing from me into her, when I remembered, and struck her on the hand. She raised her head with a gurgling shriek, and I felt her shiver. I flung her from me, and sprang to my feet.

She was on her knees, and rocked herself to and fro. A second blast of hot-stinging cold enveloped us; the moon shone out clear, and I saw her face – gaunt and ghastly, besmeared with red.

‘Down, devil!’ I cried.

‘Where are you taking me?’ she asked, with the voice of a dull echo from a sepulchre.

‘To your first husband,’ I answered.

‘He will kill me!’ she moaned.

‘At least he will take you off my hands!’

‘Give me my daughter,’ she suddenly screamed, grinding her teeth.

‘Never! Your doom is upon you at last!’

‘Loose my hands for pity’s sake!’ she groaned. ‘I am in torture. The cords are sunk in my flesh.’

‘I dare not. Lie down!’ I said.

She threw herself on the ground like a log.

The rest of the night passed in peace, and in the morning she again seemed dead.

Before evening we came in sight of the House of Bitterness, and the next moment one of the elephants came alongside of my horse.

‘Please, king, you are not going to that place?’ whispered the Little One who rode on his neck.

‘Indeed I am! We are going to stay the night there,’ I answered.

‘Oh, please, don’t! That must be where the cat-woman lives!’

‘If you had ever seen her, you would not call her by that name!’

‘Nobody ever sees her: she has lost her face! Her head is back and side all round.’

‘She hides her face from dull, discontented people! – Who taught you to call her the cat-woman?’

‘I heard the bad giants call her so.’

‘What did they say about her?’

‘That she had claws to her toes.’

‘It is not true. I know the lady. I spent a night at her house.’

‘But she *may* have claws to her toes! You might see her feet, and her claws be folded up inside their cushions!’

‘Then perhaps you think that I have claws to my toes?’

‘Oh, no; that can’t be! you are good!’

‘The giants might have told you so!’ I pursued.

‘We shouldn’t believe them about you!’

‘Are the giants good?’

‘No; they love lying.’

‘Then why do you believe them about her? I know the lady is good; she cannot have claws.’

‘Please how do you know she is good?’

‘How do you know I am good?’

I rode on, while he waited for his companions, and told them what I had said.

They hastened after me, and when they came up –

‘I would not take you to her house if I did not believe her good,’ I said.

‘We know you would not,’ they answered.

‘If I were to do something that frightened you – what would you say?’

‘The beasts frightened us sometimes at first, but they never hurt us!’ answered one.

‘That was before we knew them!’ added another.

‘Just so!’ I answered. ‘When you see the woman in that cottage, you will know that she is good. You may wonder at what she does, but she will always be good. I know her better than you know me. She will not hurt you, – or if she does,—’

‘Ah, you are not sure about it, king dear! You think she *may* hurt us!’

‘I am sure she will never be unkind to you, even if she does hurt you!’

They were silent for a while.

‘I’m not afraid of being hurt – a little! – a good deal!’ cried Odu. ‘But I should not like scratches in the dark! The giants say the cat-woman has claw-feet all over her house!’

‘I am taking the princess to her,’ I said.

‘Why?’

‘Because she is her friend.’

‘How can she be good then?’

‘Little Tumbledown is a friend of the princess,’ I answered; ‘so is Luva: I saw them both, more than once, trying to feed her with grapes!’

‘Little Tumbledown is good! Luva is very good!’

‘That is why they are her friends.’

‘Will the cat-woman – I mean the woman that isn’t the cat-woman, and has no claws to her toes – give her grapes?’

‘She is more likely to give her scratches!’

‘Why? – You say she is her friend!’

‘That is just why. – A friend is one who gives us what we need, and the princess is sorely in need of a terrible scratching.’

They were silent again.

‘If any of you are afraid,’ I said, ‘you may go home; I shall not prevent you. But I cannot take one with me who believes the giants rather than me, or one who will call a good lady the cat-woman!’

‘Please, king,’ said one, ‘I’m so afraid of being afraid!’

‘My boy,’ I answered, ‘There is no harm in being afraid. The only harm is in doing what Fear tells you. Fear is not your master! Laugh in his face and he will run away.’

‘There she is – in the door waiting for us!’ cried one, and put his hands over his eyes.

‘How ugly she is!’ cried another, and did the same.

‘You do not see her,’ I said; ‘her face is covered!’

‘She has no face!’ they answered.

‘She has a very beautiful face. I saw it once. – It is indeed as beautiful as Lona’s!’ I added with a sigh.

‘Then what makes her hide it?’

‘I think I know: – anyhow, she has some good reason for it!’

‘I don’t like the cat-woman! she is frightful!’

‘You cannot like, and you ought not to dislike what you have never seen. – Once more, you must not call her the cat-woman!’

‘What are we to call her then, please?’

‘Lady Mara!’

‘That is a pretty name!’ said a girl; ‘I will call her “lady Mara”; then perhaps she will show me her beautiful face!’

Mara, drest and muffled in white, was indeed standing in the doorway to receive us.

‘At last!’ she said ‘Lilith’s hour has been long on the way, but it is come! Everything comes. Thousands of years have I waited – and not in vain!’

She came to me, took my treasure from my arms, carried it into the house, and returning, took the princess. Lilith shuddered, but made no resistance. The beasts lay down by the door. We followed our hostess, the Little Ones looking very grave. She laid the princess on a rough settle at one side of the room, unbound her, and turned to us.

‘Mr Vane,’ she said, ‘and you, Little Ones, I thank you! This woman would not yield to gentler measures; harder must have their turn. I must do what I can to make her repent!’

The pitiful-hearted Little Ones began to sob sorely.

‘Will you hurt her very much, lady Mara?’ said the girl I have just mentioned, putting her warm little hand in mine.

‘Yes; I am afraid I must; I fear she will make me!’ answered Mara. ‘It would be cruel to hurt her too little. It would have all to be done again, only worse.’

‘May I stop with her?’

‘No, my child. She loves no one, therefore she cannot be *with* any one. There is One who will be with her, but she will not be with Him.’

‘Will the shadow that came down the hill be with her?’

‘The great Shadow will be in her, I fear, but he cannot be *with* her, or with any one. She will know I am beside her, but that will not comfort her.’

‘Will you scratch her very deep?’ asked Odu, going near, and putting his hand in hers. ‘Please, don’t make the red juice come!’

She caught him up, turned her back to the rest of us, drew the muffling down from her face, and held him at arms’ length that he might see her.

As if his face had been a mirror, I saw in it what he saw. For one moment he stared, his little mouth open; then a divine wonder arose in his countenance, and swiftly changed to intense delight. For a minute he gazed entranced, then she set him down. Yet a moment he stood looking up at her, lost in contemplation – then ran to us with the face of a prophet that knows a bliss he cannot tell. Mara rearranged her mufflings, and turned to the other children.

'You must eat and drink before you go to sleep,' she said; 'you have had a long journey!'

She set the bread of her house before them, and a jug of cold water. They had never seen bread before, and this was hard and dry, but they ate it without sign of distaste. They had never seen water before, but they drank without demur, one after the other looking up from the draught with a face of glad astonishment. Then she led away the smallest, and the rest went trooping after her. With her own gentle hands, they told me, she put them to bed on the floor of the garret.

CHAPTER 39

That Night

Their night was a troubled one, and they brought a strange report of it into the day. Whether the fear of their sleep came out into their waking, or their waking fear sank with them into their dreams, awake or asleep they were never at rest from it. All night something seemed going on in the house – something silent, something terrible, something they were not to know. Never a sound awoke; the darkness was one with the silence, and the silence was the terror.

Once, a frightful wind filled the house, and shook its inside, they said, so that it quivered and trembled like a horse shaking himself; but it was a silent wind that made not even a moan in their chamber, and passed away like a soundless sob.

They fell asleep. But they woke again with a great start. They thought the house was filling with water such as they had been drinking. It came from below, and swelled up until the garret was full of it to the very roof. But it made no more sound than the wind, and when it sank away, they fell asleep dry and warm.

The next time they woke, all the air, they said, inside and out, was full of cats. They swarmed – up and down, along and across, everywhere about the room. They felt their claws trying to get through the night-gowns lady Mara had put on them, but they could not, and in the morning not one of them had a scratch. Through the dark suddenly, came the only sound they heard the night long – the far-off howl of the huge great-grandmother-cat in the desert: she must have been calling her little ones, they thought, for that

instant the cats stopped, and all was still. Once more they fell fast asleep, and did not wake till the sun was rising.

Such was the account the children gave of their experiences. But I was with the veiled woman and the princess all through the night: something of what took place I saw; much I only felt; and there was more which eye could not see, and heart only could in a measure understand.

As soon as Mara left the room with the children, my eyes fell on the white leopardess: I thought we had left her behind us, but there she was, cowering in a corner. Apparently she was in mortal terror of what she might see. A lamp stood on the high chimney-piece, and sometimes the room seemed full of lamp-shadows, sometimes of cloudy forms. The princess lay on the settle by the wall, and seemed never to have moved hand or foot. It was a fearsome waiting.

When Mara returned, she drew the settle with Lilith upon it to the middle of the room, then sat down opposite me, at the other side of the hearth. Between us burned a small fire.

Something terrible was on its way! The cloudy presences flickered and shook. A silvery creature like a slowworm came crawling out from among them, slowly crossed the clay floor, and crept into the fire. We sat motionless. The something came nearer.

But the hours passed, midnight drew nigh, and there was no change. The night was very still. Not a sound broke the silence, not a rustle from the fire, not a crack from board or beam. Now and again I felt a sort of heave, but whether in the earth or in the air or in the waters under the earth, whether in my own body or in my soul – whether it was anywhere, I could not tell. A dread sense of judgment was upon me. But I was not afraid, for I had ceased to care for aught save the thing that must be done.

Suddenly it was midnight. The muffled woman rose, turned toward the settle, and slowly unwound the long swathes that hid her face: they dropped on the ground, and she stepped over them. The feet of the princess were toward the hearth. Mara went to her head, and turning, stood behind it. Then I saw her face. It was lovely beyond speech – white and sad, heart-and-soul sad, but not unhappy, and I knew it never could be unhappy. Great tears were running down her cheeks; she wiped them away with her robe; her countenance grew very still, and she wept no more. But for the pity in every line of her expression, she would have seemed severe. She laid her

hand on the head of the princess – on the hair that grew low on the forehead, and stooping, breathed on the sallow brow. The body shuddered.

'Will you turn away from the wicked things you have been doing so long?' said Mara gently.

The princess did not answer. Mara put the question again, in the same soft, inviting tone.

Still there was no sign of hearing. She spoke the words a third time.

Then the seeming corpse opened its mouth and answered, its words appearing to frame themselves of something else than sound. – I cannot shape the thing further: sounds they were not, yet they were words to me.

'I will not,' she said. 'I will be myself and not another!'

'Alas, you are another now, not yourself! Will you not be your real self?'

'I will be what I mean myself now.'

'If you were restored, would you not make what amends you could for the misery you have caused?'

'I would do after my nature.'

'You do not know it: your nature is good, and you do evil!'

'I will do as my Self pleases – as my Self desires.'

'You will do as the Shadow, overshadowing your Self inclines you?'

'I will do what I will to do.'

'You have killed your daughter, Lilith!'

'I have killed thousands. She is my own!'

'She was never yours as you are another's.'

'I am not another's; I am my own, and my daughter is mine.'

'Then, alas, your hour is come!'

'I care not. I am what I am; no one can take from me myself!'

'You are not the Self you imagine.'

'So long as I feel myself what it pleases me to think myself, I care not. I am content to be to myself what I would be. What I choose to seem to myself makes me what I am. My own thought makes me me; my own thought of myself is me. Another shall not make me!'

'But another has made you, and can compel you to see what you have made yourself. You will not be able much longer to look to yourself anything but what he sees you! You will not much longer have satisfaction in the thought of yourself. At this moment you are aware of the coming change!'

‘No one ever made me. I defy that Power to unmake me from a free woman! You are his slave, and I defy you! You may be able to torture me – I do not know, but you shall not compel me to anything against my will!’

‘Such a compulsion would be without value. But there is a light that goes deeper than the will, a light that lights up the darkness behind it: that light can change your will, can make it truly yours and not another’s – not the Shadow’s. Into the created can pour itself the creating will, and so redeem it!’

‘That light shall not enter me: I hate it! – Begone, slave!’

‘I am no slave, for I love that light, and will with the deeper will which created mine. There is no slave but the creature that wills against its creator. Who is a slave but her who cries, “I am free,” yet cannot cease to exist!’

‘You speak foolishness from a cowering heart! You imagine me given over to you: I defy you! I hold myself against you! What I choose to be, you cannot change. I will not be what you think me – what you say I am!’

‘I am sorry: you must suffer!’

‘But be free!’

‘She alone is free who would make free; she loves not freedom who would enslave: she is herself a slave. Every life, every will, every heart that came within your ken, you have sought to subdue you are the slave of every slave you have made – such a slave that you do not know it! – See your own self!’

She took her hand from the head of the princess, and went two backward paces from her.

A soundless presence as of roaring flame possessed the house – the same, I presume, that was to the children a silent wind. Involuntarily I turned to the hearth: its fire was a still small moveless glow. But I saw the worm-thing come creeping out, white-hot, vivid as incandescent silver, the live heart of essential fire. Along the floor it crawled toward the settle, going very slow. Yet more slowly it crept up on it, and laid itself, as unwilling to go further, at the feet of the princess. I rose and stole nearer. Mara stood motionless, as one that waits an event foreknown. The shining thing crawled on to a bare bony foot: it showed no suffering, neither was the settle scorched where the worm had lain. Slowly, very slowly, it crept along her robe until it reached her bosom, where it disappeared among the folds.

The face of the princess lay stonily calm, the eyelids closed as over dead eyes; and for some minutes nothing followed. At length, on the dry, parchment-like skin, began to appear drops as of the finest dew: in a moment they were as large as seed-pearls, ran together, and began to pour down in streams. I darted forward to snatch the worm from the poor withered bosom, and crush it with my foot. But Mara, Mother of Sorrow, stepped between, and drew aside the closed edges of the robe: no serpent was there – no searing trail; the creature had passed in by the centre of the black spot, and was piercing through the joints and marrow to the thoughts and intents of the heart. The princess gave one writhing, contorted shudder, and I knew the worm was in her secret chamber.

'She is seeing herself!' said Mara; and laying her hand on my arm, she drew me three paces from the settle.

Of a sudden the princess bent her body upward in an arch, then sprang to the floor, and stood erect. The horror in her face made me tremble lest her eyes should open, and the sight of them overwhelm me. Her bosom heaved and sank, but no breath issued. Her hair hung and dripped; then it stood out from her head and emitted sparks; again hung down, and poured the sweat of her torture on the floor.

I would have thrown my arms about her, but Mara stopped me.

'You cannot go near her,' she said. 'She is far away from us, afar in the hell of her self-consciousness. The central fire of the universe is radiating into her the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge of what she is. She sees at last the good she is not, the evil she is. She knows that she is herself the fire in which she is burning, but she does not know that the Light of Life is the heart of that fire. Her torment is that she is what she is. Do not fear for her; she is not forsaken. No gentler way to help her was left. Wait and watch.'

It may have been five minutes or five years that she stood thus – I cannot tell; but at last she flung herself on her face.

Mara went to her, and stood looking down upon her. Large tears fell from her eyes on the woman who had never wept, and would not weep.

'Will you change your way?' she said at length.

'Why did he make me such?' gasped Lilith 'I would have made myself – oh, so different! I am glad it was he that made me and not I myself! He alone is to blame for what I am! Never would I have made such a worthless

thing! He meant me such that I might know it and be miserable! I will not be made any longer!'

'Unmake yourself, then,' said Mara.

'Alas, I cannot! You know it, and mock me! How often have I not agonised to cease, but the tyrant keeps me being! I curse him! – Now let him kill me!'

The words came in jets as from a dying fountain.

'Had he not made you,' said Mara, gently and slowly, 'you could not even hate him. But he did not make you such. You have made yourself what you are. – Be of better cheer: he can remake you.'

'I will not be remade!'

'He will not change you; he will only restore you to what you were.'

'I will not be aught of his making.'

'Are you not willing to have that set right which you have set wrong?'

She lay silent; her suffering seemed abated.

'If you are willing, put yourself again on the settle.'

'I will not,' she answered, forcing the words through her clenched teeth.

A wind seemed to wake inside the house, blowing without sound or impact; and a water began to rise that had no lap in its ripples, no sob in its swell. It was cold, but it did not benumb. Unseen and noiseless it came. It smote no sense in me, yet I knew it rising. I saw it lift at last and float her. Gently it bore her, unable to resist, and left rather than laid her on the settle. Then it sank swiftly away.

The strife of thought, accusing and excusing, began afresh, and gathered fierceness. The soul of Lilith lay naked to the torture of pure interpenetrating inward light. She began to moan, and sigh deep sighs, then murmur as holding colloquy with a dividual self: her queendom was no longer whole; it was divided against itself. One moment she would exult as over her worst enemy, and weep; the next she would writhe as in the embrace of a friend whom her soul hated, and laugh like a demon. At length she began what seemed a tale about herself, in a language so strange, and in forms so shadowy, that I could but here and there understand a little. Yet the language seemed the primeval shape of one I knew well, and the forms to belong to dreams which had once been mine, but refused to be recalled. The tale appeared now and then to touch upon things that Adam had read from the disparted manuscript, and often to make allusion to influences and

forces – vices too, I could not help suspecting – with which I was unacquainted.

She ceased, and again came the horror in her hair, the sparkling and flowing alternate I sent a beseeching look to Mara.

‘Those, alas, are not the tears of repentance!’ she said. ‘The true tears gather in the eyes. Those are far more bitter, and not so good. Self-loathing is not sorrow. Yet it is good, for it marks a step in the way home, and in the father’s arms the prodigal forgets the self he abominates. Once with his father, he is to himself of no more account. It will be so with her.’

She went nearer and said,

‘Will you restore that which you have wrongfully taken?’

‘I have taken nothing,’ answered the princess, forcing out the words in spite of pain, ‘that I had not the right to take. My power to take manifested my right.’

Mara left her.

Gradually my soul grew aware of an invisible darkness, a something more terrible than aught that had yet made itself felt. A horrible Nothingness, a Negation positive infolded her; the border of its being that was yet no being, touched me, and for one ghastly instant I seemed alone with Death Absolute! It was not the absence of everything I felt, but the presence of Nothing. The princess dashed herself from the settle to the floor with an exceeding great and bitter cry. It was the recoil of Being from Annihilation.

‘For pity’s sake,’ she shrieked, ‘tear my heart out, but let me live!’

With that there fell upon her, and upon us also who watched with her, the perfect calm as of a summer night. Suffering had all but reached the brim of her life’s cup, and a hand had emptied it! She raised her head, half rose, and looked around her. A moment more, and she stood erect, with the air of a conqueror: she had won the battle! Dareful she had met her spiritual foes; they had withdrawn defeated! She raised her withered arm above her head, a paean of unholy triumph in her throat – when suddenly her eyes fixed in a ghastly stare. – What was she seeing?

I looked, and saw: before her, cast from unseen heavenly mirror, stood the reflection of herself, and beside it a form of splendent beauty. She trembled, and sank again on the floor helpless. She knew the one that God had intended her to be, the other that she had made herself.

The rest of the night she lay motionless altogether.

With the gray dawn growing in the room, she rose, turned to Mara, and said, in prideful humility.

'You have conquered. Let me go into the wilderness and bewail myself.'

Mara saw that her submission was not feigned, neither was it real. She looked at her a moment, and returned:

'Begin, then, and set right in the place of wrong.'

'I know not how,' she replied – with the look of one who foresaw and feared the answer.

'Open thy hand, and let that which is in it go.'

A fierce refusal seemed to struggle for passage, but she kept it prisoned.

'I cannot,' she said 'I have no longer the power. Open it for me.'

She held out the offending hand. It was more a paw than a hand. It seemed to me plain that she could not open it.

Mara did not even look at it.

'You must open it yourself,' she said quietly.

'I have told you I cannot!'

'You can if you will – not indeed at once, but by persistent effort. What you have done, you do not yet wish undone – do not yet intend to undo!'

'You think so, I dare say,' rejoined the princess with a flash of insolence, 'but I *know* that I cannot open my hand!'

'I know you better than you know yourself, and I know you can. You have often opened it a little way. Without trouble and pain you cannot open it quite, but you *can* open it. At worst you could beat it open! I pray you, gather your strength, and open it wide.'

'I will not try what I know impossible. It would be the part of a fool!'

'Which you have been playing all your life! Oh, you are hard to teach!'

Defiance reappeared on the face of the princess. She turned her back on Mara, saying,

'I know what you have been tormenting me for! You have not succeeded, nor shall you succeed! You shall yet find me stronger than you think! I will yet be mistress of myself! I am still what I have always known myself – queen of Hell, and mistress of the worlds!'

Then came the most fearful thing of all. I did not know what it was; I knew myself unable to imagine it, I knew only that if it came near me I should die of terror! I now know that it was *Life in Death* – life dead, yet

existent; and I knew that Lilith had had glimpses, but only glimpses of it before: it had never been with her until now.

She stood as she had turned. Mara went and sat down by the fire. Fearing to stand alone with the princess, I went also and sat again by the hearth. Something began to depart from me. A sense of cold, yet not what we call cold, crept, not into, but out of my being, and pervaded it. The lamp of life and the eternal fire seemed dying together, and I about to be left with naught but the consciousness that I had been alive. Mercifully, bereavement did not go so far, and my thought went back to Lilith.

Something was taking place in her which we did not know. We knew we did not feel what she felt, but we knew we felt something of the misery it caused her. The thing itself was in her, not in us; its reflex, her misery, reached us, and was again reflected in us; she was in the outer darkness, we present with her who was in it! We were not in the outer darkness; had we been, we could not have been *with* her, we should have been timelessly, spacelessly, absolutely apart. The darkness knows neither the light nor itself; only the light know itself and the darkness also. None but God hates evil and understands it.

Something was gone from her, which then first, by its absence, she knew to have been with her every moment of her wicked years. The source of life had withdrawn itself; all that was left her of conscious being was the dregs of her dead and corrupted life.

She stood rigid. Mara buried her head in her hands. I gazed on the face of one who knew existence but not love – knew nor life, nor joy, nor good; with my eyes I saw the face of a live death! She knew life only to know that it was dead, and that, in her, death lived. It was not merely that life had ceased in her, but that she was consciously a dead thing. She had killed her life, and was dead – and knew it. She must *death it* for ever and ever! She had tried her hardest to unmake herself, and could not! she was a dead life! she could not cease! she must *be*! In her face I saw and read beyond its misery – saw in its dismay that the dismay behind it was more than it could manifest. It sent out a livid gloom; the light that was in her was darkness, and after its kind it shone. She was what God could not have created. She had usurped beyond her share in self-creation, and her part had undone His! She saw now what she had made, and behold, it was not good! She was as a conscious corpse, whose coffin would never come to pieces, never set her

free! Her bodily eyes stood wide open, as if gazing into the heart of horror essential – her own indestructible evil. Her right hand also was now clenched – upon existent Nothing – her inheritance!

But with God all things are possible: He can save even the rich!

Without change of look, without sign of purpose, Lilith walked toward Mara. She felt her coming, and rose to meet her.

'I yield,' said the princess 'I cannot hold out. I am defeated. – Not the less, I cannot open my hand.'

'Have you tried?'

'I am trying now with all my might.'

'I will take you to my father. You have wronged him worst of the created, therefore he best of the created can help you.'

'How can *he* help me?'

'He will forgive you.'

'Ah, if he would but help me to cease! Not even that am I capable of! I have no power over myself; I am a slave! I acknowledge it. Let me die.'

'A slave thou art that shall one day be a child!' answered Mara. – 'Verily, thou shalt die, but not as thou thinkest. Thou shalt die out of death into life. Now is the Life for, that never was against thee!'

Like her mother, in whom lay the motherhood of all the world, Mara put her arms around Lilith, and kissed her on the forehead. The fiery-cold misery went out of her eyes, and their fountains filled. She lifted, and bore her to her own bed in a corner of the room, laid her softly upon it, and closed her eyes with caressing hands.

Lilith lay and wept. The Lady of Sorrow went to the door and opened it.

Morn, with the Spring in her arms, waited outside. Softly they stole in at the opened door, with a gentle wind in the skirts of their garments. It flowed and flowed about Lilith, rippling the unknown, upwaking sea of her life eternal; rippling and to ripple it, until at length she who had been but as a weed cast on the dry sandy shore to wither, should know herself an inlet of the everlasting ocean, henceforth to flow into her for ever, and ebb no more. She answered the morning wind with reviving breath, and began to listen. For in the skirts of the wind had come the rain – the soft rain that heals the mown, the many-wounded grass – soothing it with the sweetness of all music, the hush that lives between music and silence. It bedewed the desert places around the cottage, and the sands of Lilith's heart heard it, and drank

it in. When Mara returned to sit by her bed, her tears were flowing softer than the rain, and soon she was fast asleep.

CHAPTER 40

The House of Death

The Mother of Sorrows rose, muffled her face, and went to call the Little Ones. They slept as if all the night they had not moved, but the moment she spoke they sprang to their feet, fresh as if new-made. Merrily down the stair they followed her, and she brought them where the princess lay, her tears yet flowing as she slept. Their glad faces grew grave. They looked from the princess out on the rain, then back at the princess.

'The sky is falling!' said one.

'The white juice is running out of the princess!' cried another, with an awed look.

'Is it rivers?' asked Odu, gazing at the little streams that flowed adown her hollow cheeks.

'Yes,' answered Mara, '—the most wonderful of all rivers.'

'I thought rivers was bigger, and rushed, like a lot of Little Ones, making loud noises!' he returned, looking at me, from whom alone he had heard of rivers.

'Look at the rivers of the sky!' said Mara 'See how they come down to wake up the waters under the earth! Soon will the rivers be flowing everywhere, merry and loud, like thousands and thousands of happy children. Oh, how glad they will make you, Little Ones! You have never seen any, and do not know how lovely is the water!'

'That will be the glad of the ground that the princess is grown good,' said Odu 'See the glad of the sky!'

‘Are the rivers the glad of the princess?’ asked Luva. ‘They are not her juice, for they are not red!’

‘They are the juice inside the juice,’ answered Mara.

Odu put one finger to his eye, looked at it, and shook his head.

‘Princess will not bite now!’ said Luva.

‘No; she will never do that again,’ replied Mara. ‘— But now we must take her nearer home.’

‘Is that a nest?’ asked Sozo.

‘Yes; a very big nest. But we must take her to another place first.’

‘What is that?’

‘It is the biggest room in all this world. – But I think it is going to be pulled down: it will soon be too full of little nests. – Go and get your clumsies.’

‘Please are there any cats in it?’

‘Not one. The nests are too full of lovely dreams for one cat to get in.’

‘We shall be ready in a minute,’ said Odu, and ran out, followed by all except Luva.

Lilith was now awake, and listening with a sad smile.

‘But her rivers are running so fast!’ said Luva, who stood by her side and seemed unable to take her eyes from her face. ‘Her robe is all – I don’t know what. Clumsies won’t like it!’

‘They won’t mind it,’ answered Mara. ‘Those rivers are so clean that they make the whole world clean.’

I had fallen asleep by the fire, but for some time had been awake and listening, and now rose.

‘It is time to mount, Mr Vane,’ said our hostess.

‘Tell me, please,’ I said, ‘is there not a way by which to avoid the channels and the den of monsters?’

‘There is an easy way across the river-bed, which I will show you,’ she answered; ‘but you must pass once more through the monsters.’

‘I fear for the children,’ I said.

‘Fear will not once come nigh them,’ she rejoined.

We left the cottage. The beasts stood waiting about the door. Odu was already on the neck of one of the two that were to carry the princess. I mounted Lona’s horse; Mara brought her body, and gave it me in my arms. When she came out again with the princess, a cry of delight arose from the

children: she was no longer muffled! Gazing at her, and entranced with her loveliness, the boys forgot to receive the princess from her; but the elephants took Lilith tenderly with their trunks, one round her body and one round her knees, and, Mara helping, laid her along between them.

'Why does the princess want to go?' asked a small boy. 'She would keep good if she staid here!'

'She wants to go, and she does not want to go: we are helping her,' answered Mara. 'She will not keep good here.'

'What are you helping her to do?' he went on.

'To go where she will get more help – help to open her hand, which has been closed for a thousand years.'

'So long? Then she has learned to do without it: why should she open it now?'

'Because it is shut upon something that is not hers.'

'Please, lady Mara, may we have some of your very dry bread before we go?' said Luva.

Mara smiled, and brought them four loaves and a great jug of water.

'We will eat as we go,' they said. But they drank the water with delight.

'I think,' remarked one of them, 'it must be elephant-juice! It makes me so strong!'

We set out, the Lady of Sorrow walking with us, more beautiful than the sun, and the white leopardess following her. I thought she meant but to put us in the path across the channels, but I soon found she was going with us all the way. Then I would have dismounted that she might ride, but she would not let me.

'I have no burden to carry,' she said. 'The children and I will walk together.'

It was the loveliest of mornings; the sun shone his brightest, and the wind blew his sweetest, but they did not comfort the desert, for it had no water.

We crossed the channels without difficulty, the children gamboling about Mara all the way, but did not reach the top of the ridge over the bad burrow until the sun was already in the act of disappearing. Then I made the Little Ones mount their elephants, for the moon might be late, and I could not help some anxiety about them.

The Lady of Sorrow now led the way by my side; the elephants followed – the two that bore the princess in the centre; the leopardess brought up the

rear; and just as we reached the frightful margin, the moon looked up and showed the shallow basin lying before us untroubled. Mara stepped into it; not a movement answered her tread or the feet of my horse. But the moment that the elephants carrying the princess touched it, the seemingly solid earth began to heave and boil, and the whole dread brood of the hellish nest was commoved. Monsters uprose on all sides, every neck at full length, every beak and claw out-stretched, every mouth agape. Long-billed heads, horribly jawed faces, knotty tentacles innumerable, went out after Lilith. She lay in an agony of fear, nor dared stir a finger. Whether the hideous things even saw the children, I doubt; certainly not one of them touched a child; not one loathly member passed the live rampart of her body-guard, to lay hold of her.

'Little Ones,' I cried, 'keep your elephants close about the princess. Be brave; they will not touch you.'

'What will not touch us? We don't know what to be brave at!' they answered; and I perceived they were unaware of one of the deformities around them.

'Never mind then,' I returned; 'only keep close.'

They were panoplied in their blindness! Incapacity to see was their safety. What they could nowise be aware of, could not hurt them.

But the hideous forms I saw that night! Mara was a few paces in front of me when a solitary, bodiless head bounced on the path between us. The leopardess came rushing under the elephants from behind, and would have seized it, but, with frightful contortions of visage and a loathsome howl, it gave itself a rapid rotatory twist, sprang from her, and buried itself in the ground. The death in my arms assoiling me from fear, I regarded them all unmoved, although never, sure, was elsewhere beheld such a crew accursed!

Mara still went in front of me, and the leopardess now walked close behind her, shivering often, for it was very cold, when suddenly the ground before me to my left began to heave, and a low wave of earth came slinking toward us. It rose higher as it drew near; out of it slouched a dreadful head with fleshy tubes for hair, and opening a great oval mouth, snapped at me. The leopardess sprang, but fell baffled beyond it.

Almost under our feet, shot up the head of an enormous snake, with a lamping wallowing glare in its eyes. Again the leopardess rushed to the

attack, but found nothing. At a third monster she darted with like fury, and like failure – then sullenly ceased to heed the phantom-horde. But I understood the peril and hastened the crossing – the rather that the moon was carrying herself strangely. Even as she rose she seemed ready to drop and give up the attempt as hopeless; and since, I saw her sink back once fully her own breadth. The arc she made was very low, and now she had begun to descend rapidly.

We were almost over, when, between us and the border of the basin, arose a long neck, on the top of which, like the blossom of some Stygian lily, sat what seemed the head of a corpse, its mouth half open, and full of canine teeth I went on; it retreated, then drew aside. The lady stepped on the firm land, but the leopardess between us, roused once more, turned, and flew at the throat of the terror I remained where I was to see the elephants, with the princess and the children, safe on the bank. Then I turned to look after the leopardess. That moment the moon went down. For an instant I saw the leopardess and the snake-monster convolved in a cloud of dust; then darkness hid them. Trembling with fright, my horse wheeled, and in three bounds overtook the elephants.

As we came up with them, a shapeless jelly dropped on the princess. A white dove dropped immediately on the jelly, stabbing it with its beak. It made a squelching, sucking sound, and fell off. Then I heard the voice of a woman talking with Mara, and I knew the voice.

‘I fear she is dead!’ said Mara.

‘I will send and find her,’ answered the mother. ‘But why, Mara, shouldst thou at all fear for her or for any one? Death cannot hurt her who dies doing the work given her to do.’

‘I shall miss her sorely; she is good and wise. Yet I would not have her live beyond her hour!’

‘She has gone down with the wicked; she will rise with the righteous. We shall see her again ere very long.’

‘Mother,’ I said, although I did not see her, ‘we come to you many, but most of us are Little Ones. Will you be able to receive us all?’

‘You are welcome every one,’ she answered. ‘Sooner or later all will be little ones, for all must sleep in my house! It is well with those that go to sleep young and willing! – My husband is even now preparing her couch

for Lilith. She is neither young nor quite willing, but it is well indeed that she is come.'

I heard no more. Mother and daughter had gone away together through the dark. But we saw a light in the distance, and toward it we went stumbling over the moor.

Adam stood in the door, holding the candle to guide us, and talking with his wife, who, behind him, laid bread and wine on the table within.

'Happy children,' I heard her say, 'to have looked already on the face of my daughter! Surely it is the lovelist in the great world!'

When we reached the door, Adam welcomed us almost merrily. He set the candle on the threshold, and going to the elephants, would have taken the princess to carry her in; but she repulsed him, and pushing her elephants asunder, stood erect between them. They walked from beside her, and left her with him who had been her husband – ashamed indeed of her gaunt uncomeliness, but unsubmissive. He stood with a welcome in his eyes that shone through their severity.

'We have long waited for thee, Lilith!' he said.

She returned him no answer.

Eve and her daughter came to the door.

'The mortal foe of my children!' murmured Eve, standing radiant in her beauty.

'Your children are no longer in her danger,' said Mara; 'she has turned from evil.'

'Trust her not hastily, Mara,' answered her mother; 'she has deceived a multitude!'

'But you will open to her the mirror of the Law of Liberty, mother, that she may go into it, and abide in it! She consents to open her hand and restore: will not the great Father restore her to inheritance with His other children?'

'I do not know Him!' murmured Lilith, in a voice of fear and doubt.

'Therefore it is that thou art miserable,' said Adam.

'I will go back whence I came!' she cried, and turned, wringing her hands, to depart.

'That is indeed what I would have thee do, where I would have thee go – to Him from whom thou camest! In thy agony didst thou not cry out for Him?'

‘I cried out for Death – to escape Him and thee!’

‘Death is even now on his way to lead thee to Him. Thou knowest neither Death nor the Life that dwells in Death! Both befriend thee. I am dead, and would see thee dead, for I live and love thee. Thou art weary and heavy-laden: art thou not ashamed? Is not the being thou hast corrupted become to thee at length an evil thing? Wouldst thou yet live on in disgrace eternal? Cease thou canst not: wilt thou not be restored and *be?*’

She stood stilent with bowed head.

‘Father,’ said Mara, ‘take her in thine arms, and carry her to her couch. There she will open her hand, and die into life.’

‘I will walk,’ said the princess.

Adam turned and led the way. The princess walked feebly after him into the cottage.

Then Eve came out to me where I sat with Lona in my bosom. She reached up her arms, took her from me, and carried her in. I dismounted, and the children also. The horse and the elephants stood shivering; Mara patted and stroked them every one; they lay down and fell asleep. She led us into the cottage, and gave the Little Ones of the bread and wine on the table. Adam and Lilith were standing there together, but silent both.

Eve came from the chamber of death, where she had laid Lona down, and offered of the bread and wine to the princess.

‘Thy beauty slays me! It is death I would have, not food!’ said Lilith, and turned from her.

‘This food will help thee to die,’ answered Eve.

But Lilith would not taste of it.

‘If thou wilt nor eat nor drink, Lilith,’ said Adam, ‘come and see the place where thou shalt lie in peace.’

He led the way through the door of death, and she followed submissive. But when her foot crossed the threshold she drew it back, and pressed her hand to her bosom, struck through with the cold immortal.

A wild blast fell roaring on the roof, and died away in a moan. She stood ghastly with terror.

‘It is he!’ said her voiceless lips: I read their motion.

‘Who, princess!’ I whispered.

‘The great Shadow,’ she murmured.

‘Here he cannot enter,’ said Adam ‘Here he can hurt no one. Over him also is power given me.’

‘Are the children in the house?’ asked Lilith, and at the word the heart of Eve began to love her.

‘He never dared touch a child,’ she said ‘Nor have you either ever hurt a child. Your own daughter you have but sent into the loveliest sleep, for she was already a long time dead when you slew her. And now Death shall be the atone-maker; you shall sleep together.’

‘Wife,’ said Adam, ‘let us first put the children to bed, that she may see them safe!’

He came back to fetch them. As soon as he was gone, the princess knelt to Eve, clasped her knees, and said,

‘Beautiful Eve, persuade your husband to kill me: to you he will listen! Indeed I would but cannot open my hand.’

‘You cannot die without opening it. To kill you would not serve you,’ answered Eve. ‘But indeed he cannot! no one can kill you but the Shadow; and whom he kills never knows she is dead, but lives to do his will, and thinks she is doing her own.’

‘Show me then to my grave; I am so weary I can live no longer. I must go to the Shadow – yet I would not!’

She did not, could not understand!

She struggled to rise, but fell at the feet of Eve. The Mother lifted, and carried her inward.

I followed Adam and Mara and the children into the chamber of death. We passed Eve with Lilith in her arms, and went farther in.

‘You shall not go to the Shadow,’ I heard Eve say, as we passed them ‘Even now is his head under my heel!’

The dim light in Adam’s hand glimmered on the sleeping faces, and as he went on, the darkness closed over them. The very air seemed dead: was it because none of the sleepers breathed it? Profoundest sleep filled the wide place. It was as if not one had waked since last I was there, for the forms I had then noted lay there still. My father was just as I had left him, save that he seemed yet nearer to a perfect peace. The woman beside him looked younger.

The darkness, the cold, the silence, the still air, the faces of the lovely dead, made the hearts of the children beat softly, but their little tongues

would talk – with low, hushed voices.

‘What a curious place to sleep in!’ said one, ‘I would rather be in my nest!’

‘It is *so* cold!’ said another.

‘Yes, it is cold,’ answered our host; ‘but you will not be cold in your sleep.’

‘Where are our nests?’ asked more than one, looking round and seeing no couch unoccupied.

‘Find places, and sleep where you choose,’ replied Adam.

Instantly they scattered, advancing fearlessly beyond the light, but we still heard their gentle voices, and it was plain they saw where I could not.

‘Oh,’ cried one, ‘here is such a beautiful lady! – may I sleep beside her? I will creep in quietly, and not wake her.’

‘Yes, you may,’ answered the voice of Eve behind us, and we came to the couch while the little fellow was yet creeping slowly and softly under the sheet. He laid his head beside the lady’s, looked up at us, and was still. His eyelids fell; he was asleep.

We went a little farther, and there was another who had climbed up on the couch of a woman.

‘Mother! mother!’ he cried, kneeling over her, his face close to hers. ‘— She’s so cold she can’t speak,’ he said, looking up to us; ‘but I will soon make her warm!’

He lay down, and pressing close to her, put his little arm over her. In an instant he too was asleep, smiling an absolute content.

We came to a third Little One; it was Luva. She stood on tiptoe, leaning over the edge of a couch.

‘My own mother wouldn’t have me,’ she said softly: ‘will you?’

Receiving no reply, she looked up at Eve. The great mother lifted her to the couch, and she got at once under the snowy covering.

Each of the Little Ones had by this time, except three of the boys, found at least an unobjecting bedfellow, and lay still and white beside a still, white woman. The little orphans had adopted mothers! One tiny girl had chosen a father to sleep with, and that was mine. A boy lay by the side of the beautiful matron with the slow-healing hand. On the middle one of the three couches hitherto unoccupied, lay Lona.

Eve set Lilith down beside it. Adam pointed to the vacant couch on Lona's right hand, and said,

'There, Lilith, is the bed I have prepared for you!'

She glanced at her daughter lying before her like a statue carved in semi-transparent alabaster, and shuddered from head to foot. 'How cold it is!' she murmured.

'You will soon begin to find comfort in the cold,' answered Adam.

'Promises to the dying are easy!' she said.

'But I know it: I too have slept. I am dead!'

'I believed you dead long ago; but I see you alive!'

'More alive than you know, or are able to understand. I was scarce alive when first you knew me. Now I have slept, and am awake; I am dead, and live indeed!'

'I fear that child,' she said, pointing to Lona: 'she will rise and terrify me!'

'She is dreaming love to you.'

'But the Shadow!' she moaned; 'I fear the Shadow! he will be wroth with me!'

'He at sight of whom the horses of heaven start and rear, dares not disturb one dream in this quiet chamber!'

'I shall dream then?'

'You will dream.'

'What dreams?'

'That I cannot tell, but none *he* can enter into. When the Shadow comes here, it will be to lie down and sleep also. – His hour will come, and he knows it will.'

'How long shall I sleep?'

'You and he will be the last to wake in the morning of the universe.'

The princess lay down, drew the sheet over her, stretched herself out straight, and lay still with open eyes.

Adam turned to his daughter. She drew near.

'Lilith,' said Mara, 'you will not sleep, if you lie there a thousand years, until you have opened your hand, and yielded that which is not yours to give or to withhold.'

'I cannot,' she answered. 'I would if I could, and gladly, for I am weary, and the shadows of death are gathering about me.'

‘They will gather and gather, but they cannot infold you while yet your hand remains unopened. You may think you are dead, but it will be only a dream; you may think you have come awake, but it will still be only a dream. Open your hand, and you will sleep indeed – then wake indeed.’

‘I am trying hard, but the fingers have grown together and into the palm.’

‘I pray you put forth the strength of your will. For the love of life, draw together your forces and break its bonds!’

‘I have struggled in vain; I can do no more. I am very weary, and sleep lies heavy upon my lids.’

‘The moment you open your hand, you will sleep. Open it, and make an end.’

A tinge of colour arose in the parchment-like face; the contorted hand trembled with agonised effort, Mara took it, and sought to aid her.

‘Hold, Mara!’ cried her father. ‘There is danger!’

The princess turned her eyes upon Eve, beseechingly.

‘There was a sword I once saw in your husband’s hands,’ she murmured. ‘I fled when I saw it. I heard him who bore it say it would divide whatever was not one and indivisible!’

‘I have the sword,’ said Adam. ‘The angel gave it me when he left the gate.’

‘Bring it, Adam,’ pleaded Lilith, ‘and cut me off this hand that I may sleep.’

‘I will,’ he answered.

He gave the candle to Eve, and went. The princess closed her eyes.

In a few minutes Adam returned with an ancient weapon in his hand. The scabbard looked like vellum grown dark with years, but the hilt shone like gold that nothing could tarnish. He drew out the blade. It flashed like a pale blue northern streamer, and the light of it made the princess open her eyes. She saw the sword, shuddered, and held out her hand. Adam took it. The sword gleamed once, there was one little gush of blood, and he laid the severed hand in Mara’s lap. Lilith had given one moan, and was already fast asleep. Mara covered the arm with the sheet, and the three turned away.

‘Will you not dress the wound?’ I said.

‘A wound from that sword,’ answered Adam, ‘needs no dressing. It is healing and not hurt.’

‘Poor lady!’ I said, ‘she will wake with but one hand!’

‘Where the dead deformity clung,’ replied Mara, ‘the true, lovely hand is already growing.’

We heard a childish voice behind us, and turned again. The candle in Eve’s hand shone on the sleeping face of Lilith, and the waking faces of the three Little Ones, grouped on the other side of her couch.

‘How beautiful she is grown!’ said one of them.

‘Poor princess!’ said another; ‘I will sleep with her. She will not bite any more!’

As he spoke he climbed into her bed, and was immediately fast asleep. Eve covered him with the sheet.

‘I will go on her other side,’ said the third. ‘She shall have two to kiss when she wakes!’

‘And I am left alone!’ said the first mournfully.

‘I will put you to bed,’ said Eve.

She gave the candle to her husband, and led the child away.

We turned once more to go back to the cottage. I was very sad, for no one had offered me a place in the house of the dead. Eve joined us as we went, and walked on before with her husband. Mara by my side carried the hand of Lilith in the lap of her robe.

‘Ah, you have found her!’ we heard Eve say as we stepped into the cottage.

The door stood open; two elephant-trunks came through it out of the night beyond.

‘I sent them with the lantern,’ she went on to her husband, ‘to look for Mara’s leopardess: they have brought her.’

I followed Adam to the door, and between us we took the white creature from the elephants, and carried her to the chamber we had just left, the women preceding us, Eve with the light, and Mara still carrying the hand. There we laid the beauty across the feet of the princess, her fore-paws outstretched and her head couching between them.

CHAPTER 41

I am Sent

Then I turned and said to Eve.

‘Mother, one couch next to Lona is empty: I know I am unworthy, but may I not sleep this night in your chamber with my dead? Will you not pardon both my cowardice and my self-confidence, and take me in? I give me up. I am sick of myself, and would fain sleep the sleep!’

‘The couch next to Lona is the one already prepared for you,’ she answered; ‘but something waits to be done ere you sleep.’

‘I am ready,’ I replied.

‘How do you know you can do it?’ she asked with a smile

‘Because you require it,’ I answered. ‘What is it?’

She turned to Adam:

‘Is he forgiven, husband?’

‘From my heart.’

‘Then tell him what he has to do.’

Adam turned to his daughter.

‘Give me that hand, Mara, my child.’

She held it out to him in her lap. He took it tenderly.

‘Let us go to the cottage,’ he said to me; ‘there I will instruct you.’

As we went, again arose a sudden stormful blast, mingled with a great flapping on the roof, but it died away as before in a deep moan.

When the door of the death-chamber was closed behind us, Adam seated himself, and I stood before him.

‘You will remember,’ he said, ‘how, after leaving my daughter’s house, you came to a dry rock, bearing the marks of an ancient cataract; you climbed that rock, and found a sandy desert: go to that rock now, and from its summit walk deep into the desert. But go not many steps ere you lie down, and listen with your head on the sand. If you hear the murmur of water beneath, go a little farther, and listen again. If you still hear the sound, you are in the right direction. Every few yards you must stop, lie down, and hearken. If, listening thus, at any time you hear no sound of water, you are out of the way, and must hearken in every direction until you hear it again. Keeping with the sound, and careful not to retrace your steps, you will soon hear it louder, and the growing sound will lead you to where it is loudest: that is the spot you seek. There dig with the spade I will give you, and dig until you come to moisture: in it lay the hand, cover it to the level of the desert, and come home. – But give good heed, and carry the hand with care. Never lay it down, in what place of seeming safety soever; let nothing touch it; stop nor turn aside for any attempt to bar your way; never look behind you; speak to no one, answer no one, walk straight on. – It is yet dark, and the morning is far distant, but you must set out at once.’

He gave me the hand, and brought me a spade.

‘This is my gardening spade,’ he said; ‘with it I have brought many a lovely thing to the sun.’

I took it, and went out into the night.

It was very cold, and pitch-dark. To fall would be a dread thing, and the way I had to go was a difficult one even in the broad sunlight! But I had not set myself the task, and the minute I started I learned that I was left to no chance: a pale light broke from the ground at every step, and showed me where next to set my foot. Through the heather and the low rocks I walked without once even stumbling. I found the bad burrow quite still; not a wave arose, not a head appeared as I crossed it.

A moon came, and herself showed me the easy way: toward morning I was almost over the dry channels of the first branch of the river-bed, and not far, I judged, from Mara’s cottage.

The moon was very low, and the sun not yet up, when I saw before me in the path, here narrowed by rocks, a figure covered from head to foot as with a veil of moonlit mist. I kept on my way as if I saw nothing. The figure threw aside its veil.

‘Have you forgotten me already?’ said the princess – or what seemed she.

I neither hesitated nor answered; I walked straight on.

‘You meant then to leave me in that horrible sepulchre! Do you not yet understand that where I please to be, there I am? Take my hand: I am alive as you!’

I was on the point of saying, ‘Give me your left hand,’ but bethought myself, held my peace, and steadily advanced.

‘Give me my hand,’ she suddenly shrieked, ‘or I will tear you in pieces: you are mine!’

She flung herself upon me. I shuddered, but did not falter. Nothing touched me, and I saw her no more.

With measured tread along the path, filling it for some distance, came a body of armed men. I walked through them – nor know whether they gave way to me, or were bodiless things. But they turned and followed me; I heard and felt their march at my very heels; but I cast no look behind, and the sound of their steps and the clash of their armour died away.

A little farther on, the moon being now close to the horizon and the way in deep shadow, I descried, seated where the path was so narrow that I could not pass her, a woman with muffled face.

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘you are come at last! I have waited here for you an hour or more! You have done well! Your trial is over. My father sent me to meet you that you might have a little rest on the way. Give me your charge, and lay your head in my lap; I will take good care of both until the sun is well risen I am not bitterness always, neither to all men!’

Her words were terrible with temptation, for I was very weary. And what more likely to be true! If I were through slavish obedience to the letter of the command and lack of pure insight, to trample under my feet the very person of the Lady of Sorrow! My heart grew faint at the thought, then beat as if it would burst my bosom.

Nevertheless my will hardened itself against my heart, and my step did not falter. I took my tongue between my teeth lest I should unawares answer, and kept on my way. If Adam had sent her, he could not complain that I would not heed her! Nor would the Lady of Sorrow love me the less that even she had not been able to turn me aside!

Just ere I reached the phantom, she pulled the covering from her face: great indeed was her loveliness, but those were not Mara’s eyes! no lie

could truly or for long imitate them! I advanced as if the thing were not there, and my foot found empty room.

I had almost reached the other side when a Shadow – I think it was The Shadow, barred my way. He seemed to have a helmet upon his head, but as I drew closer I perceived it was the head itself I saw – so distorted as to bear but a doubtful resemblance to the human. A cold wind smote me, dank and sickening – repulsive as the air of a charnel-house; firmness forsook my joints, and my limbs trembled as if they would drop in a helpless heap. I seemed to pass through him, but I think now that he passed through me: for a moment I was as one of the damned. Then a soft wind like the first breath of a new-born spring greeted me, and before me arose the dawn.

My way now led me past the door of Mara's cottage. It stood wide open, and upon the table I saw a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water. In or around the cottage was neither howl nor wail.

I came to the precipice that testified to the vanished river. I climbed its worn face, and went on into the desert. There at last, after much listening to and fro, I determined the spot where the hidden water was loudest, hung Lilith's hand about my neck, and began to dig. It was a long labour, for I had to make a large hole because of the looseness of the sand; but at length I threw up a damp spadeful. I flung the sexton-tool on the verge, and laid down the hand. A little water was already oozing from under its fingers. I sprang out, and made haste to fill the grave. Then, utterly fatigued, I dropped beside it, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER 42

I Sleep the Sleep

When I woke, the ground was moist about me, and my track to the grave was growing a quicksand. In its ancient course the river was swelling, and had begun to shove at its burden. Soon it would be roaring down the precipice, and, divided in its fall, rushing with one branch to resubmerge the orchard valley, with the other to drown perhaps the monster horde, and between them to isle the Evil Wood. I set out at once on my return to those who sent me.

When I came to the precipice, I took my way betwixt the branches, for I would pass again by the cottage of Mara, lest she should have returned: I longed to see her once more ere I went to sleep; and now I knew where to cross the channels, even if the river should have overtaken me and filled them. But when I reached it, the door stood open still; the bread and the water were still on the table; and deep silence was within and around it. I stopped and called aloud at the door, but no voice replied, and I went my way.

A little farther, I came where sat a grayheaded man on the sand, weeping.

‘What ails you, sir?’ I asked. ‘Are you forsaken?’

‘I weep,’ he answered, ‘because they will not let me die. I have been to the house of death, and its mistress, notwithstanding my years, refuses me. Intercede for me, sir, if you know her, I pray you.’

‘Nay, sir,’ I replied, ‘that I cannot; for she refuses none whom it is lawful for her to receive.’

‘How know you this of her? You have never sought death! you are much too young to desire it!’

‘I fear your words may indicate that, were you young again, neither would you desire it.’

‘Indeed, young sir, I would not! and certain I am that you cannot.’

‘I may not be old enough to desire to die, but I am young enough to desire to live indeed! Therefore I go now to learn if she will at length take me in. You wish to die because you do not care to live: she will not open her door to you, for no one can die who does not long to live.’

‘It ill becomes your youth to mock a friendless old man. Pray, cease your riddles!’

‘Did not then the Mother tell you something of the same sort?’

‘In truth I believe she did; but I gave little heed to her excuses.’

‘Ah, then, sir,’ I rejoined, ‘it is but too plain you have not yet learned to die, and I am heartily grieved for you. Such had I too been but for the Lady of Sorrow. I am indeed young, but I have wept many tears; pardon me, therefore, if I presume to offer counsel: – Go to the Lady of Sorrow, and “take with both hands” what she will give you. Yonder lies her cottage. She is not in it now, but her door stands open, and there is bread and water on her table. Go in; sit down; eat of the bread; drink of the water; and wait there until she appear. Then ask counsel of her, for she is true, and her wisdom is great.’

He fell to weeping afresh, and I left him weeping. What I said, I fear he did not heed. But Mara would find him!

The sun was down, and the moon unrisen, when I reached the abode of the monsters, but it was still as a stone till I passed over. Then I heard a noise of many waters, and a great cry behind me, but I did not turn my head.

Ere I reached the house of death, the cold was bitter and the darkness dense; and the cold and the darkness were one, and entered into my bones together. But the candle of Eve, shining from the window, guided me, and kept both frost and murk from my heart.

The door stood open, and the cottage lay empty I sat down disconsolate.

And as I sat, there grew in me such a sense of loneliness as never yet in my wanderings had I felt. Thousands were near me, not one was with me! True, it was I who was dead, not they; but, whether by their life or by my

death, we were divided! They were alive, but I was not dead enough even to know them alive: doubt *would* come. They were, at best, far from me, and helpers I had none to lay me beside them!

Never before had I known, or truly imagined desolation! In vain I took myself to task, saying the solitude was but a seeming; I was awake, and they slept – that was all! it was only that they lay so still and did not speak! they were with me now, and soon, soon I should be with them!

I dropped Adam's old spade, and the dull sound of its fall on the clay floor seemed reverberated from the chamber beyond: a childish terror seized me; I sat and stared at the coffin-door. – But father Adam, mother Eve, sister Mara would soon come to me, and then – welcome the cold world and the white neighbours! I forgot my fears, lived a little, and loved my dead.

Something did move in the chamber of the dead! There came from it what was *like* a dim, far-off sound, yet was not what I knew as sound. My soul sprang into my ears. Was it a mere thrill of the dead air, too slight to be heard, but quivering in every spiritual sense? I *knew* without hearing, without feeling it!

The something was coming! it drew nearer! In the bosom of my desertion awoke an infant hope. The noiseless thrill reached the coffin-door – became sound, and smote on my ear.

The door began to move – with a low, soft creaking of its hinges. It was opening! I ceased to listen, and stared expectant.

It opened a little way, and a face came into the opening. It was Lona's. Its eyes were closed, but the face itself was upon me, and seemed to see me. It was white as Eve's, white as Mara's, but did not shine like their faces. She spoke, and her voice was like a sleepy night-wind in the grass.

'Are you coming, king?' it said. 'I cannot rest until you are with me, gliding down the river to the great sea, and the beautiful dream-land. The sleepiness is full of lovely things: come and see them.'

'Ah, my darling!' I cried. 'Had I but known! – I thought you were dead!'

She lay on my bosom – cold as ice frozen to marble. She threw her arms, so white, feebly about me, and sighed—

'Carry me back to my bed, king. I want to sleep.'

I bore her to the death-chamber, holding her tight lest she should dissolve out of my arms. Unaware that I saw, I carried her straight to her couch.

‘Lay me down,’ she said, ‘and cover me from the warm air; it hurts – a little. Your bed is there, next to mine. I shall see you when I wake.’

She was already asleep. I threw myself on my couch – blessed as never was man on the eve of his wedding.

‘Come, sweet cold,’ I said, ‘and still my heart speedily.’

But there came instead a glimmer of light in the chamber, and I saw the face of Adam approaching. He had not the candle, yet I saw him. At the side of Lona’s couch, he looked down on her with a questioning smile, and then greeted me across it.

‘We have been to the top of the hill to hear the waters on their way,’ he said. ‘They will be in the den of the monsters to-night. – But why did you not await our return?’

‘My child could not sleep,’ I answered.

‘She is fast asleep!’ he rejoined.

‘Yes, now!’ I said; ‘but she was awake when I laid her down.’

‘She was asleep all the time!’ he insisted. ‘She was perhaps dreaming about you – and came to you?’

‘She did.’

‘And did you not see that her eyes were closed?’

‘Now I think of it, I did!’

‘If you had looked ere you laid her down, you would have seen her asleep on the couch.’

‘That would have been terrible!’

‘You would only have found that she was no longer in your arms.’

‘That would have been worse!’

‘It is, perhaps, to think of, but to see it would not have troubled you.’

‘Dear father,’ I said, ‘how is it that I am not sleepy? I thought I should go to sleep like the Little Ones the moment I laid my head down!’

‘Your hour is not quite come. You must have food ere you sleep.’

‘Ah, I ought not to have lain down without your leave, for I cannot sleep without your help! I will get up at once!’

But I found my own weight more than I could move.

‘There is no need: we will serve you here,’ he answered. ‘—You do not feel cold, do you?’

‘Not too cold to lie still, but perhaps too cold to eat!’

He came to the side of my couch, bent over me, and breathed on my heart. At once I was warm.

As he left me, I heard a voice, and knew it was the Mother's. She was singing, and her song was sweet and soft and low, and I thought she sat by my bed in the dark; but ere it ceased, her song soared aloft, and seemed to come from the throat of a woman-angel, high above all the region larks, higher than man had ever yet lifted up his heart. I heard every word she sang, but could keep only this: –

'Many a wrong, and its curing song,
Many a road, and many an inn,
Room to roam, but only one home
For all the world to win!'

and I thought I had heard the song before.

Then the three came to my couch together, bringing me bread and wine, and I sat up to partake of it. Adam stood on one side of me, Eve and Mara on the other.

'You are good indeed, father Adam, mother Eve, sister Mara,' I said, 'to receive me! In my soul I am ashamed and sorry!'

'We knew you would come again!' answered Eve.

'How could you know it?' I returned.

'Because here was I, born to look after my brothers and sisters!' answered Mara with a smile.

'Every creature must one night yield himself and lie down,' answered Adam: 'he was made for liberty, and must not be left a slave!'

'It will be late, I fear, ere all have lain down!' I said.

'There is no early or late here,' he rejoined. 'For him the true time then first begins who lays himself down. Men are not coming home fast; women are coming faster. A desert, wide and dreary, parts him who lies down to die from him who lies down to live. The former may well make haste, but here is no haste.'

'To our eyes,' said Eve, 'you were coming all the time: we knew Mara would find you, and you must come!'

'How long is it since my father lay down?' I asked.

‘I have told you that years are of no consequence in this house,’ answered Adam; ‘we do not heed them. Your father will wake when his morning comes. Your mother, next to whom you are lying,—’

‘Ah, then, it *is* my mother!’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes – she with the wounded hand,’ he assented; ‘—she will be up and away long ere your morning is ripe.’

‘I am sorry.’

‘Rather be glad.’

‘It must be a sight for God Himself to see such a woman come awake!’

‘It is indeed a sight for God, a sight that makes her Maker glad! He sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied! – Look at her once more, and sleep.’

He let the rays of his candle fall on her beautiful face.

‘She looks much younger!’ I said.

‘She is much younger,’ he replied. ‘Even Lilith already begins to look younger!’

I lay down, blissfully drowsy.

‘But when you see your mother again,’ he continued, ‘you will not at first know her. She will go on steadily growing younger until she reaches the perfection of her womanhood – a splendour beyond foresight. Then she will open her eyes, behold on one side her husband, on the other her son – and rise and leave them to go to a father and a brother more to her than they.’

I heard as one in a dream. I was very cold, but already the cold caused me no suffering. I felt them put on me the white garment of the dead. Then I forgot everything. The night about me was pale with sleeping faces, but I was asleep also, nor knew that I slept.

CHAPTER 43

The Dreams that Came

I grew aware of existence, aware also of the profound, the infinite cold. I was intensely blessed – more blessed, I know, than my heart, imagining, can now recall. I could not think of warmth with the least suggestion of pleasure. I knew that I had enjoyed it, but could not remember how. The cold had soothed every care, dissolved every pain, comforted every sorrow. *Comforted?* Nay; sorrow was swallowed up in the life drawing nigh to restore every good and lovely thing a hundredfold! I lay at peace, full of the quietest expectation, breathing the damp odours of Earth's bountiful bosom, aware of the souls of primroses, daisies and snowdrops, patiently waiting in it for the Spring.

How convey the delight of that frozen, yet conscious sleep! I had no more to stand up! had only to lie stretched out and still! How cold I was, words cannot tell; yet I grew colder and colder – and welcomed the cold yet more and more. I grew continuously less conscious of myself, continuously more conscious of bliss, unimaginable yet felt. I had neither made it nor prayed for it: it was mine in virtue of existence; and existence was mine in virtue of a Will that dwelt in mine.

Then the dreams began to arrive – and came crowding. – I lay naked on a snowy peak. The white mist heaved below me like a billowy sea. The cold moon was in the air with me, and above the moon and me the colder sky, in which the moon and I dwelt. I was Adam, waiting for God to breathe into my nostrils the breath of life. – I was not Adam, but a child in the bosom of a mother white with radiant whiteness. I was a youth on a white horse,

leaping from cloud to cloud of a blue heaven, hasting calmly to some blessed goal. For centuries I dreamed – or was it chiliads? or only one long night? – But why ask? for time had nothing to do with me; I was in the land of thought – farther in, higher up than the seven dimensions, the ten senses: I think I was where I am – in the heart of God. – I dreamed away dim cycles in the centre of a melting glacier, the spectral moon drawing nearer and nearer, the wind and the welter of a torrent growing in my ears. I lay and heard them: the wind and the water and the moon sang a peaceful waiting for a redemption drawing nigh. I dreamed cycles, I say, but, for aught I knew or can tell, they were the solemn, aeonian march of a second, pregnant with eternity.

Then, of a sudden, but not once troubling my conscious bliss, all the wrongs I had ever done, from far beyond my earthly memory down to the present moment, were with me. Fully in every wrong lived the conscious I, confessing, abjuring, lamenting the dead, making atonement with each person I had injured, hurt, or offended. Every human soul to which I had caused a troubled thought, was now grown unspeakably dear to me, and I humbled myself before it, agonising to cast from between us the clinging offence. I wept at the feet of the mother whose commands I had slighted; with bitter shame I confessed to my father that I had told him two lies, and long forgotten them: now for long had remembered them, and kept them in memory to crush at last at his feet. I was the eager slave of all whom I had thus or anyhow wronged. Countless services I devised to render them! For this one I would build such a house as had never grown from the ground! for that one I would train such horses as had never yet been seen in any world! For a third I would make such a garden as had never bloomed, haunted with still pools, and alive with running waters! I would write songs to make hearts swell, and tales to make them glow! I would turn the forces of the world into such channels of invention as to make them laugh with the joy of wonder! Love possessed me! Love was my life! Love was to me, as to him that made me, all in all!

Suddenly I found myself in a solid blackness, upon which the ghost of light that dwells in the caverns of the eyes could not cast one fancied glimmer. But my heart, which feared nothing and hoped infinitely, was full of peace. I lay imagining what the light would be when it came, and what

new creation it would bring with it – when, suddenly, without conscious volition, I sat up and stared about me.

The moon was looking in at the lowest, horizontal, crypt-like windows of the death-chamber, her long light slanting, I thought, across the fallen, but still ripening sheaves of the harvest of the great husbandman. – But no; that harvest was gone! Gathered in, or swept away by chaotic storm, not a sacred sheaf was there! My dead were gone! I was alone! – In desolation dread lay depths yet deeper than I had hitherto known! – Had there never been any ripening dead? Had I but dreamed them and their loveliness? Why then these walls? why the empty couches? No; they were all up! they were all abroad in the new eternal day, and had forgotten me! They had left me behind, and alone! Tenfold more terrible was the tomb its inhabitants away! The quiet ones had made me quiet with their presence – had pervaded my mind with their blissful peace; now I had no friend, and my lovers were far from me! A moment I sat and stared horror-stricken. I had been alone with the moon on a mountain top in the sky, now I was alone with her in a huge cenotaph: she too was staring about, seeking her dead with ghastly gaze! I sprang to my feet, and staggered from the fearful place.

The cottage was empty. I ran out into the night.

No moon was there! Even as I left the chamber, a cloudy rampart had risen and covered her. But a broad shimmer came from far over the heath, mingled with a ghostly murmuring music, as if the moon were raining a light that plashed as it fell. I ran stumbling across the moor, and found a lovely lake, margined with reeds and rushes: the moon behind the cloud was gazing upon the monsters' den, full of clearest, brightest water, and very still. – But the musical murmur went on, filling the quiet air, and drawing me after it.

I walked round the border of the little mere, and climbed the range of hills. What a sight rose to my eyes! The whole expanse where, with hot, aching feet, I had crossed and recrossed the deep-scorched channels and ravines of the dry river-bed, was alive with streams, with torrents, with still pools – 'a river deep and wide!' How the moon flashed on the water! how the water answered the moon with flashes of its own – white flashes breaking everywhere from its rock-encountered flow! And a great jubilant song arose from its bosom, the song of new-born liberty. I stood a moment gazing, and my heart also began to exult: my life was not all a failure! I had

helped to set this river free! – My dead were not lost! I had but to go after and find them! I would follow and follow until I came whither they had gone! Our meeting might be thousands of years away, but at last – *at last* I should hold them! Wherefore else did the floods clap their hands?

I hurried down the hill: my pilgrimage was begun! In what direction to turn my steps I knew not, but I must go and go till I found my living dead! A torrent ran swift and wide at the foot of the range: I rushed in, it laid no hold upon me; I waded through it. The next I sprang across; the third I swam; the next I waded again.

I stopped to gaze on the wondrous loveliness of the ceaseless flash and flow, and to hearken to the multitudinous broken music. Every now and then some incipient air would seem about to draw itself clear of the dulcet confusion, only to merge again in the consorted roar. At moments the world of waters would invade as if to overwhelm me – not with the force of its seaward rush, or the shouting of its liberated throng, but with the greatness of the silence wandering into sound.

As I stood lost in delight, a hand was laid on my shoulder. I turned, and saw a man in the prime of strength, beautiful as if fresh from the heart of the glad creator, young like him who cannot grow old. I looked: it was Adam. He stood large and grand, clothed in a white robe, with the moon in his hair.

'Father,' I cried, 'where is she? Where are the dead? Is the great resurrection come and gone? The terror of my loneliness was upon me, I could not sleep without my dead, I ran from the desolate chamber. – Whither shall I go to find them?'

'You mistake, my son,' he answered, in a voice whose very breath was consolation. 'You are still in the chamber of death, still upon your couch, asleep and dreaming, with the dead around you.'

'Alas! when I but dream how am I to know it? The dream best dreamed is the likest to the waking truth!'

'When you are quite dead, you will dream no false dream. The soul that is true can generate nothing that is not true, neither can the false enter it.'

'But, sir,' I faltered, 'how am I to distinguish betwixt the true and the false where both alike seem real?'

'Do you not understand?' he returned, with a smile that might have slain all the sorrows of all his children. 'You *cannot* perfectly distinguish

between the true and the false while you are not yet quite dead; neither indeed will you when you are quite dead – that is, quite alive, for then the false will never present itself. At this moment, believe me, you are on your bed in the house of death.'

'I am trying hard to believe you, father. I do indeed believe you, although I can neither see nor feel the truth of what you say.'

'You are not to blame that you cannot. And because even in a dream you believe me, I will help you. – Put forth your left hand open, and close it gently: it will clasp the hand of your Lona, who lies asleep where you lie dreaming you are awake.'

I put forth my hand: it closed on the hand of Lona, firm and soft and deathless.

'But, father,' I cried, 'she is warm!'

'Your hand is as warm to hers. Cold is a thing unknown in our country. Neither she nor you are yet in the fields of home, but each to each is alive and warm and healthful.'

Then my heart was glad. But immediately supervened a sharp-stinging doubt.

'Father,' I said, 'forgive me, but how am I to know surely that this also is not a part of the lovely dream in which I am now walking with thyself?'

'Thou doubtest because thou lovest the truth. Some would willingly believe life but a phantasm, if only it might for ever afford them a world of pleasant dreams: thou art not of such! Be content for a while not to know surely. The hour will come, and that ere long, when, being true, thou shalt behold the very truth, and doubt will be for ever dead. Scarce, then, wilt thou be able to recall the features of the phantom. Thou wilt then know that which thou canst not now dream. Thou hast not yet looked the Truth in the face, hast as yet at best but seen him through a cloud. That which thou seest not, and never didst see save in a glass darkly – that which, indeed, never can be known save by its innate splendour shining straight into pure eyes – that thou canst not but doubt, and art blameless in doubting until thou seest it face to face, when thou wilt no longer be able to doubt it. But to him who has once seen even a shadow only of the truth, and, even but hoping he has seen it when it is present no longer, tries to obey it – to him the real vision, the Truth himself, will come, and depart no more, but abide with him for ever.'

‘I think I see, father,’ I said; ‘I think I understand.’

‘Then remember, and recall. Trials yet await thee, heavy, of a nature thou knowest not now. Remember the things thou hast seen. Truly thou knowest not those things, but thou knowest what they have seemed, what they have meant to thee! Remember also the things thou shalt yet see. Truth is all in all; and the truth of things lies, at once hid and revealed, in their seeming.’

‘How can that be, father?’ I said, and raised my eyes with the question; for I had been listening with downbent head, aware of nothing but the voice of Adam.

He was gone; in my ears was nought but the sounding silence of the swift-flowing waters. I stretched forth my hands to find him, but no answering touch met their seeking. I was alone – alone in the land of dreams! To myself I seemed wide awake, but I believed I was in a dream, because he had told me so.

Even in a dream, however, the dreamer must do something! he cannot sit down and refuse to stir until the dream grow weary of him and depart: I took up my wandering, and went on.

Many channels I crossed, and came to a wider space of rock; there, dreaming I was weary, I laid myself down, and longed to be awake.

I was about to rise and resume my journey, when I discovered that I lay beside a pit in the rock, whose mouth was like that of a grave. It was deep and dark; I could see no bottom.

Now in the dreams of my childhood I had found that a fall invariably woke me, and would, therefore, when desiring to discontinue a dream, seek some eminence whence to cast myself down that I might wake: with one glance at the peaceful heavens, and one at the rushing waters, I rolled myself over the edge of the pit.

For a moment consciousness left me. When it returned, I stood in the garret of my own house, in the little wooden chamber of the cowl and the mirror.

Unspeakable despair, hopelessness blank and dreary, invaded me with the knowledge: between me and my Lona lay an abyss impassable! stretched a distance no chain could measure! Space and Time and Mode of Being, as with walls of adamant unscalable, impenetrable, shut me in from that gulf! True, it might yet be in my power to pass again through the door of light, and journey back to the chamber of the dead; and if so, I was parted from

that chamber only by a wide heath, and by the pale, starry night betwixt me and the sun, which alone could open for me the mirror-door, and was now far away on the other side of the world! but an immeasurably wider gulf sank between us in this – that she was asleep and I was awake! that I was no longer worthy to share with her that sleep, and could no longer hope to awake from it with her! For truly I was much to blame: I had fled from my dream! The dream was not of my making, any more than was my life: I ought to have seen it to the end! and in fleeing from it, I had left the holy sleep itself behind me! – I would go back to Adam, tell him the truth, and bow to his decree!

I crept to my chamber, threw myself on my bed, and passed a dreamless night.

I rose, and listlessly sought the library. On the way I met no one; the house seemed dead. I sat down with a book to await the noontide: not a sentence could I understand! The mutilated manuscript offered itself from the masked door: the sight of it sickened me; what to me was the princess with her devilry!

I rose and looked out of a window. It was a brilliant morning. With a great rush the fountain shot high, and fell roaring back. The sun sat in its feathery top. Not a bird sang, not a creature was to be seen. Raven nor librarian came near me. The world was dead about me. I took another book, sat down again, and went on waiting.

Noon was near. I went up the stairs to the dumb, shadowy roof. I closed behind me the door into the wooden chamber, and turned to open the door out of a dreary world.

I left the chamber with a heart of stone. Do what I might, all was fruitless. I pulled the chains; adjusted and re-adjusted the hood; arranged and re-arranged the mirrors; no result followed. I waited and waited to give the vision time; it would not come; the mirror stood blank; nothing lay in its dim old depth but the mirror opposite and my haggard face.

I went back to the library. There the books were hateful to me – for I had once loved them.

That night I lay awake from down-lying to uprising, and the next day renewed my endeavours with the mystic door. But all was yet in vain. How the hours went I cannot think. No one came nigh me; not a sound from the

house below entered my ears. Not once did I feel weary – only desolate, drearily desolate.

I passed a second sleepless night. In the morning I went for the last time to the chamber in the roof, and for the last time sought an open door: there was none. My heart died within me. I had lost my Lona!

Was she anywhere? had she ever been, save in the mouldering cells of my brain? ‘I must die one day,’ I thought, ‘and then, straight from my death-bed, I will set out to find her! If she is not, I will go to the Father and say – “Even thou canst not help me: let me cease, I pray thee!”’

CHAPTER 44

The Waking

The fourth night I seemed to fall asleep, and that night woke indeed. I opened my eyes and knew, although all was dark around me, that I lay in the house of death, and that every moment since there I fell asleep I had been dreaming, and now first was awake. ‘At last!’ I said to my heart, and it leaped for joy. I turned my eyes; Lona stood by my couch, waiting for me! I had never lost her! – only for a little time lost the sight of her! Truly I needed not have lamented her so sorely!

It was dark, as I say, but I saw her: *she* was not dark! Her eyes shone with the radiance of the Mother’s, and the same light issued from her face – nor from her face only, for her death-dress, filled with the light of her body now tenfold awake in the power of its resurrection, was white as snow and glistering. She fell asleep a girl; she awoke a woman, ripe with the loveliness of the life essential. I folded her in my arms, and knew that I lived indeed.

‘I woke first!’ she said, with a wondering smile.

‘You did, my love, and woke me!’

‘I only looked at you and waited,’ she answered.

The candle came floating toward us through the dark, and in a few moments Adam and Eve and Mara were with us. They greeted us with a quiet good-morning and a smile: they were used to such wakings!

‘I hope you have had a pleasant darkness!’ said the Mother.

‘Not very,’ I answered, ‘but the waking from it is heavenly.’

‘It is but begun,’ she rejoined; ‘you are hardly yet awake!’

‘He is at least clothed-upon with Death, which is the radiant garment of Life,’ said Adam.

He embraced Lona his child, put an arm around me, looked a moment or two inquiringly at the princess, and patted the head of the leopardess.

‘I think we shall meet you two again before long,’ he said, looking first at Lona, then at me.

‘Have we to die again?’ I asked.

‘No,’ he answered, with a smile like the Mother’s; ‘you have died into life, and will die no more; you have only to keep dead. Once dying as we die here, all the dying is over. Now you have only to live, and that you must, with all your blessed might. The more you live, the stronger you become to live.’

‘But shall I not grow weary with living so strong?’ I said. ‘What if I cease to live with all my might?’

‘It needs but the will, and the strength is there!’ said the Mother. ‘Pure life has no weakness to grow weary withal. *The* Life keeps generating ours. – Those who will not die, die many times, die constantly, keep dying deeper, never have done dying; here all is upwardness and love and gladness.’

She ceased with a smile and a look that seemed to say, ‘We are mother and son; we understand each other! Between us no farewell is possible.’

Mara kissed me on the forehead, and said, gayly,

‘I told you, brother, all would be well! – When next you would comfort, say, “What will be well, is even now well.”’

She gave a little sigh, and I thought it meant, ‘But they will not believe you!’

‘—You know me now!’ she ended, with a smile like her mother’s.

‘I know you!’ I answered: ‘you are the voice that cried in the wilderness before ever the Baptist came! you are the shepherd whose wolves hunt the wandering sheep home ere the shadow rise and the night grow dark!’

‘My work will one day be over,’ she said, ‘and then I shall be glad with the gladness of the great shepherd who sent me.’

‘All the night long the morning is at hand,’ said Adam.

‘What is that flapping of wings I hear?’ I asked.

‘The Shadow is hovering,’ replied Adam: ‘there is one here whom he counts his own! But ours once, never more can she be his!’

I turned to look on the faces of my father and mother, and kiss them ere we went: their couches were empty save of the Little Ones who had with love's boldness appropriated their hospitality! For an instant that awful dream of desolation overshadowed me, and I turned aside.

'What is it, my heart?' said Lona.

'Their empty places frightened me,' I answered.

'They are up and away long ago,' said Adam. 'They kissed you ere they went, and whispered, "Come soon."'

'And I neither to feel nor hear them!' I murmured.

'How could you – far away in your dreary old house! You thought the dreadful place had you once more! Now go and find them. – Your parents, my child,' he added, turning to Lona, 'must come and find you!'

The hour of our departure was at hand. Lona went to the couch of the mother who had slain her, and kissed her tenderly – then laid herself in her father's arms.

'That kiss will draw her homeward, my Lona!' said Adam.

'Who were her parents?' asked Lona.

'My father,' answered Adam, 'is her father also.'

She turned and laid her hand in mine.

I kneeled and humbly thanked the three for helping me to die. Lona knelt beside me, and they all breathed upon us.

'Hark! I hear the sun,' said Adam.

I listened: he was coming with the rush as of a thousand times ten thousand far-off wings, with the roar of a molten and flaming world millions upon millions of miles away. His approach was a crescendo chord of a hundred harmonies.

The three looked at each other and smiled, and that smile went floating heavenward a three-petaled flower, the family's morning thanksgiving. From their mouths and their faces it spread over their bodies and shone through their garments. Ere I could say, 'Lo, they change!' Adam and Eve stood before me the angels of the resurrection, and Mara was the Magdalene with them at the sepulchre. The countenance of Adam was like lightning, and Eve held a napkin that flung flakes of splendour about the place.

A wind began to moan in pulsing gusts.

‘You hear his wings now!’ said Adam; and I knew he did not mean the wings of the morning.

‘It is the great Shadow stirring to depart,’ he went on. ‘Wretched creature, he has himself within him, and cannot rest!’

‘But is there not in him something deeper yet?’ I asked.

‘Without a substance,’ he answered, ‘a shadow cannot be – yea, or without a light behind the substance!’

He listened for a moment, then called out, with a glad smile,

‘Hark to the golden cock! Silent and motionless for millions of years has he stood on the clock of the universe; now at last he is flapping his wings! now will he begin to crow! and at intervals will men hear him until the dawn of the day eternal.’

I listened. Far away – as in the heart of an aeonian silence, I heard the clear jubilant outcry of the golden throat. It hurled defiance at death and the dark; sang infinite hope, and coming calm. It was the ‘expectation of the creature’ finding at last a voice; the cry of a chaos that would be a kingdom!

Then I heard a great flapping.

‘The black bat is flown!’ said Mara.

‘Amen, golden cock, bird of God!’ cried Adam, and the words rang through the house of silence, and went up into the airy regions.

At his *Amen* – like doves arising on wings of silver from among the potsherds, up sprang the Little Ones to their knees on their bed, calling aloud,

‘Crow! crow again, golden cock!’ – as if they had both seen and heard him in their dreams.

Then each turned and looked at the sleeping bed-fellow, gazed a moment with loving eyes, kissed the silent companion of the night, and sprang from the couch. The Little Ones who had lain down beside my father and mother gazed blank and sad for a moment at their empty places, then slid slowly to the floor. There they fell each into the other’s arms, as if then first, each by the other’s eyes, assured they were alive and awake. Suddenly spying Lona, they came running, radiant with bliss, to embrace her. Odu, catching sight of the leopardess on the feet of the princess, bounded to her next, and throwing an arm over the great sleeping head, fondled and kissed it.

‘Wake up, wake up, darling!’ he cried, ‘it is time to wake!’

The leopardess did not move.

‘She has slept herself cold!’ he said to Mara, with an upcast look of appealing consternation.

‘She is waiting for the princess to wake, my child,’ said Mara.

Odu looked at the princess, and saw beside her, still asleep, two of his companions. He flew at them.

‘Wake up! wake up!’ he cried, and pushed and pulled, now this one, now that.

But soon he began to look troubled, and turned to me with misty eyes.

‘They will not wake!’ he said. ‘And why are they so cold?’

‘They too are waiting for the princess,’ I answered.

He stretched across, and laid his hand on her face.

‘She is cold too! What is it?’ he cried – and looked round in wondering dismay.

Adam went to him.

‘Her wake is not ripe yet,’ he said: ‘she is busy forgetting. When she has forgotten enough to remember enough, then she will soon be ripe, and wake.’

‘And remember?’

‘Yes – but not too much at once thought.’

‘But the golden cock has crown!’ argued the child, and fell again upon his companions.

‘Peter! Peter! Crispy!’ he cried. ‘Wake up, Peter! wake up, Crispy! We are all awake but you two! The gold cock has crown *so* loud! The sun is awake and coming! Oh, why *won’t* you wake?’

But Peter would not wake, neither would Crispy, and Odu wept outright at last.

‘Let them sleep, darling!’ said Adam. ‘You would not like the princess to wake and find nobody? They are quite happy. So is the leopardess.’

He was comforted, and wiped his eyes as if he had been all his life used to weeping and wiping, though now first he had tears wherewith to weep – soon to be wiped altogether away.

We followed Eve to the cottage. There she offered us neither bread nor wine, but stood radiantly desiring our departure. So, with never a word of farewell, we went out. The horse and the elephants were at the door, waiting for us. We were too happy to mount them, and they followed us.

CHAPTER 45

The Journey Home

It had ceased to be dark; we walked in a dim twilight, breathing through the dimness the breath of the spring. A wondrous change had passed upon the world – or was it not rather that a change more marvellous had taken place in us? Without light enough in the sky or the air to reveal anything, every heather-bush, every small shrub, every blade of grass was perfectly visible – either by light that went out from it, as fire from the bush Moses saw in the desert, or by light that went out of our eyes. Nothing cast a shadow; all things interchanged a little light. Every growing thing showed me, by its shape and colour, its indwelling idea – the informing thought, that is, which was its being, and sent it out. My bare feet seemed to love every plant they trod upon. The world and my being, its life and mine, were one. The microcosm and macrocosm were at length atoned, at length in harmony! I lived in everything; everything entered and lived in me. To be aware of a thing, was to know its life at once and mine, to know whence we came, and where we were at home – was to know that we are all what we are, because Another is what he is! Sense after sense, hitherto asleep, awoke in me – sense after sense indescribable, because no correspondent words, no likenesses or imaginations exist, wherewithal to describe them. Full indeed – yet ever expanding, ever making room to receive – was the conscious being where things kept entering by so many open doors! When a little breeze brushing a bush of heather set its purple bells a ringing, I was myself in the joy of the bells, myself in the joy of the breeze to which responded their sweet *tintinning*, myself in the joy of the sense, and of the soul that

received all the joys together. To everything glad I lent the hall of my being wherein to revel. I was a peaceful ocean upon which the ground-swell of a living joy was continually lifting new waves; yet was the joy ever the same joy, the eternal joy, with tens of thousands of changing forms. Life was a cosmic holiday.

Now I knew that life and truth were one; that life mere and pure is in itself bliss; that where being is not bliss, it is not life, but life-in-death. Every inspiration of the dark wind that blew where it listed, went out a sigh of thanksgiving. At last I was! I lived, and nothing could touch my life! My darling walked beside me, and we were on our way home to the Father!

So much was ours ere ever the first sun rose upon our freedom: what must not the eternal day bring with it!

We came to the fearful hollow where once had wallowed the monsters of the earth: it was indeed, as I had beheld it in my dream, a lovely lake. I gazed into its pellucid depths. A whirlpool had swept out the soil in which the abortions burrowed, and at the bottom lay visible the whole horrid brood: a dim greenish light pervaded the crystalline water, and revealed every hideous form beneath it. Coiled in spires, folded in layers, knotted on themselves, or 'extended long and large,' they weltered in motionless heaps – shapes more fantastic in ghoulish, blasting dismay, than ever wine-sodden brain of exhausted poet fevered into misbeing. He who dived in the swirling Maelstrom saw none to compare with them in horror; tentacular convolutions, tumid bulges, glaring orbs of sepian deformity, would have looked to him innocence beside such incarnations of hatefulness – every head the wicked flower that, bursting from an abominable stalk, perfected its evil significance.

Not one of them moved as we passed. But they were not dead. So long as exist men and women of unwholesome mind, that lake will still be peopled with loathsomenesses.

But hark the herald of the sun, the auroral wind, softly trumpeting his approach! The master-minister of the human tabernacle is at hand! Heaping before his prow a huge ripple-fretted wave of crimson and gold, he rushes aloft, as if new launched from the urging hand of his maker into the upper sea – pauses, and looks down on the world. White-raving storm of molten metals, he is but a coal from the altar of the Father's never-ending sacrifice to his children. See every little flower straighten its stalk, lift up its neck,

and with outstretched head stand expectant: something more than the sun, greater than the light, is coming, is coming – none the less surely coming that it is long upon the road! What matters to-day, or to-morrow, or ten thousand years to Life himself, to Love himself! He is coming, is coming, and the necks of all humanity are stretched out to see him come! Every morning will they thus outstretch themselves, every evening will they droop and wait – until he comes. – Is this but an air-drawn vision? When he comes, will he indeed find them watching thus?

It was a glorious resurrection-morning. The night had been spent in preparing it!

The children went gamboling before, and the beasts came after us. Fluttering butterflies, darting dragon-flies hovered or shot hither and thither about our heads, a cloud of colours and flashes, now descending upon us like a snow-storm of rainbow flakes, now rising into the humid air like a rolling vapour of embodied odours. It was a summer-day more like itself, that is, more ideal, than ever man that had not died found summer-day in any world. I walked on the new earth, under the new heaven, and found them the same as the old, save that now they opened their minds to me, and I saw into them. Now, the soul of everything I met came out to greet me and make friends with me, telling me we came from the same, and meant the same. I was going to him, they said, with whom they always were, and whom they always meant, they were, they said, lightnings that took shape as they flashed from him to his. The dark rocks drank like sponges the rays that showered upon them; the great world soaked up the light, and sent out the living. Two joy-fires were Lona and I. Earth breathed heavenward her sweet-savoured smoke; we breathed homeward our longing desires. For thanksgiving, our very consciousness was that.

We came to the channels, once so dry and wearyful: they ran and flashed and foamed with living water that shouted in its gladness! Far as the eye could see, all was a rushing, roaring, dashing river of water made vocal by its rocks.

We did not cross it, but ‘walked in glory and in joy’ up its right bank, until we reached the great cataract at the foot of the sandy desert, where, roaring and swirling and dropping sheer, the river divided into its two branches. There we climbed the height – and found no desert: through grassy plains, between grassy banks, flowed the deep, wide, silent river full

to the brim. Then first to the Little Ones was revealed the glory of God in the limpid flow of water. Instinctively they plunged and swam, and the beasts followed them.

The desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose. Wide forests had sprung up, their whole undergrowth flowering shrubs peopled with song-birds. Every thicket gave birth to a rivulet, and every rivulet to its water-song.

The place of the buried hand gave no sign. Beyond and still beyond, the river came in full volume from afar. Up and up we went, now along grassy margin, and now through forest of gracious trees. The grass grew sweeter and its flowers more lovely and various as we went; the trees grew larger, and the wind fuller of messages.

We came at length to a forest whose trees were greater, grander, and more beautiful than any we had yet seen. Their live pillars upheaved a thick embowed roof, betwixt whose leaves and blossoms hardly a sunbeam filtered. Into the rafters of this aerial vault the children climbed, and through them went scrambling and leaping in a land of bloom, shouting to the unseen elephants below, and hearing them trumpet their replies. The conversations between them Lona understood while I but guessed at them blunderingly. The Little Ones chased the squirrels, and the squirrels, frolicking, drew them on – always at length allowing themselves to be caught and petted. Often would some bird, lovely in plumage and form, light upon one of them, sing a song of what was coming, and fly away. Not one monkey of any sort could they see.

CHAPTER 46

The City

Lona and I, who walked below, heard at last a great shout overhead, and in a moment or two the Little Ones began to come dropping down from the foliage with the news that, climbing to the top of a tree yet taller than the rest, they had descried, far across the plain, a curious something on the side of a solitary mountain – which mountain, they said, rose and rose, until the sky gathered thick to keep it down, and knocked its top off.

'It may be a city,' they said, 'but it is not at all like Bulika.'

I went up to look, and saw a great city, ascending into blue clouds, where I could not distinguish mountain from sky and cloud, or rocks from dwellings. Cloud and mountain and sky, palace and precipice mingled in a seeming chaos of broken shadow and shine.

I descended, the Little Ones came with me, and together we sped on faster. They grew yet merrier as they went, leading the way, and never looking behind them. The river grew lovelier and lovelier, until I knew that never before had I seen real water. Nothing in this world is more than *like* it.

By and by we could from the plain see the city among the blue clouds. But other clouds were gathering around a lofty tower – or was it a rock? – that stood above the city, nearer the crest of the mountain. Gray, and dark gray, and purple, they writhed in confused, contrariant motions, and tossed up a vaporous foam while spots in them gyrated like whirlpools. At length issued a dazzling flash, which seemed for a moment to play about the Little Ones in front of us. Blinding darkness followed, but through it we heard their voices, low with delight.

‘Did you see?’

‘I saw.’

‘What did you see?’

‘The beautifullest man.’

‘I heard him speak!’

‘I didn’t: what did he say?’

Here answered the smallest and most childish of the voices – that of Luva: –

‘He said, “’Ou’s all mine’s, ’ickle ones: come along!”’

I had seen the lightning, but heard no words; Lona saw and heard with the children. A second flash came, and my eyes, though not my ears, were opened. The great quivering light was compact of angel-faces. They lamped themselves visible, and vanished.

A third flash came; its substance and radiance were human.

‘I see my mother!’ I cried.

‘I see lots o’ mothers!’ said Luva.

Once more the cloud flashed – all kinds of creatures – horses and elephants, lions and dogs – oh, such beasts! And such birds! – great birds whose wings gleamed singly every colour gathered in sunset or rainbow! little birds whose feathers sparkled as with all the precious stones of the hoarding earth! – silvery cranes; red flamingoes; opal pigeons; peacocks gorgeous in gold and green and blue; jewelly humming birds! – great-winged butterflies, lithe-volumed creeping things – all in one heavenly flash!

‘I see that serpents grow birds here, as caterpillars used to grow butterflies!’ remarked Lona.

‘I saw my white pony, that died when I was a child. – I needn’t have been so sorry; I should just have waited!’ I said.

Thunder, clap or roll, there had been none. And now came a sweet rain, filling the atmosphere with a caressing coolness. We breathed deep, and stepped out with stronger strides. The falling drops flashed the colours of all the waked up gems of the earth, and a mighty rainbow spanned the city.

The blue clouds gathered thicker, the rain fell in torrents; the children exulted and ran, it was all we could do to keep them in sight.

With silent, radiant roll, the river swept onward, filling to the margin its smooth, soft, yielding channel. For, instead of rock or shingle or sand, it

flowed over grass in which grew primroses and daisies, crocuses and narcissi, pimpernels and anemones, a starry multitude, large and bright through the brilliant water. The river had gathered no turbid cloudiness from the rain, not even a tinge of yellow or brown; the delicate mass shone with the pale berylline gleam that ascended from its deep, dainty bed.

Drawing nearer to the mountain, we saw that the river came from its very peak, and rushed in full volume through the main street of the city. It descended to the gate by a stair of deep and wide steps, mingled of porphyry and serpentine, which continued to the foot of the mountain. There arriving we found shallower steps on both banks, leading up to the gate, and along the ascending street. Without the briefest halt, the Little Ones ran straight up the stair to the gate, which stood open.

Outside, on the landing, sat the portress, a woman-angel of dark visage, leaning her shadowed brow on her idle hand. The children rushed upon her, covering her with caresses, and ere she understood, they had taken heaven by surprise, and were already in the city, still mounting the stair by the side of the descending torrent. A great angel, attended by a company of shining ones, came down to meet and receive them, but merrily evading them all, up still they ran. In merry dance, however, a group of woman-angels descended upon them, and in a moment they were fettered in heavenly arms. The radiants carried them away, and I saw them no more.

‘Ah!’ said the mighty angel, continuing his descent to meet us who were now almost at the gate and within hearing of his word, ‘this is well! these are soldiers to take heaven itself by storm! – I hear of a horde of black bats on the frontiers: these will make short work with such!’

Seeing the horse and the elephants clambering up behind us—

‘Take those animals to the royal stables,’ he added; ‘there tend them; then turn them into the king’s forest.’

‘Welcome home!’ he said to us, bending low with the sweetest smile.

Immediately he turned and led the way higher. The scales of his armour flashed like flakes of lightning.

Thought cannot form itself to tell what I felt, thus received by the officers of heaven. All I wanted and knew not, must be on its way to me!

We stood for a moment at the gate whence issued roaring the radiant river. I know not whence came the stones that fashioned it, but among them I saw the prototypes of all the gems I had loved on earth – far more

beautiful than they, for these were living stones – such in which I saw, not the intent alone, but the intender too; not the idea alone, but the imbodier present, the operant outsender: nothing in this kingdom was dead; nothing was mere; nothing only a thing.

We went up through the city and passed out. There was no wall on the upper side, but a huge pile of broken rocks, upsloping like the moraine of an eternal glacier; and through the openings between the rocks, the river came billowing out. On their top I could dimly discern what seemed three or four great steps of a stair, disappearing in a cloud white as snow; and above the steps I saw, but with my mind's eye only, as it were a grand old chair, the throne of the Ancient of Days. Over and under and between those steps issued, plenteously, unceasingly new-born, the river of the water of life.

The great angel could guide us no farther: those rocks we must ascend alone!

My heart beating with hope and desire, I held faster the hand of my Lona, and we began to climb; but soon we let each other go, to use hands as well as feet in the toilsome ascent of the huge stones. At length we drew near the cloud, which hung down the steps like the borders of a garment, passed through the fringe, and entered the deep folds. A hand, warm and strong, laid hold of mine, and drew me to a little door with a golden lock. The door opened; the hand let mine go, and pushed me gently through I turned quickly, and saw the board of a large book in the act of closing behind me. I stood alone in my library.

CHAPTER 47

The ‘Endless Ending’

As yet I have not found Lona, but Mara is much with me. She has taught me many things, and is teaching me more.

Can it be that that last waking also was in the dream? that I am still in the chamber of death, asleep and dreaming, not yet ripe enough to wake? Or can it be that I did not go to sleep outright and heartily, and so have come awake too soon? If that waking was itself but a dream, surely it was a dream of a better waking yet to come, and I have not been the sport of a false vision! Such a dream must have yet lovelier truth at the heart of its dreaming!

In moments of doubt I cry,

‘Could God Himself create such lovely things as I dreamed?’

‘Whence then came thy dream?’ answers Hope.

‘Out of my dark self, into the light of my consciousness.’

‘But whence first into thy dark self?’ rejoins Hope.

‘My brain was its mother, and the fever in my blood its father.’

‘Say rather,’ suggests Hope, ‘thy brain was the violin whence it issued, and the fever in thy blood the bow that drew it forth. – But who made the violin? and who guided the bow across its strings? Say rather, again – who set the song birds each on its bough in the tree of life, and startled each in its order from its perch? Whence came the fantasia? and whence the life that danced thereto? Didst *thou* say, in the dark of thy own unconscious self, “Let beauty be; let truth seem!” and straightway beauty was, and truth but seemed?’

Man dreams and desires; God broods and wills and quickens.

When a man dreams his own dream, he is the sport of his dream; when Another gives it him, that Other is able to fulfil it.

I have never again sought the mirror. The hand sent me back: I will not go out again by that door! ‘All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.’

Now and then, when I look round on my books, they seem to waver as if a wind rippled their solid mass, and another world were about to break through. Sometimes when I am abroad, a like thing takes place; the heavens and the earth, the trees and the grass appear for a moment to shake as if about to pass away; then, lo, they have settled again into the old familiar face! At times I seem to hear whisperings around me, as if some that loved me were talking of me; but when I would distinguish the words, they cease, and all is very still. I know not whether these things rise in my brain, or enter it from without. I do not seek them; they come, and I let them go.

Strange dim memories, which will not abide identification, often, through misty windows of the past, look out upon me in the broad daylight, but I never dream now. It may be, notwithstanding, that, when most awake, I am only dreaming the more! But when I wake at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more.

I wait; asleep or awake, I wait.

Novalis says, ‘Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one.’

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